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MARY THE THIRD

Author of:

EXPRESSING WILLIE
HE AND SHE
39 EAST
WHAT THEY THINK
PEGGY
IMPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED
IMPORTANCE OF BEING NICE
IMPORTANCE OF BEING CLOTHED
IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WOMAN

MARY THE THIRD

A Comedy in Prologue
and Three Acts

By
RACHEL CROTHERS

BAKER'S PLAYS

178 TREMONT STREET
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

and

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MARY THE THIRD

CAST

MARY THE FIRST (1870).
WILLIAM.
MARY THE SECOND (1897).
ROBERT.
RICHARD.
MARY THE THIRD (1923).
MOTHER.
GRANNY.
FATHER.
BOBBY.
LYNN.
HAL.
LETTIE.
MAX.
NORA.

PROLOGUE: TIME: 1870 and 1897.
ACTS I, II and III: TIME: Our present day.

218497

MARY THE THIRD

THE ORIGINAL CAST

As played at the 39th Street Theatre, New York

Mary the First, 1870	*Louise Huff*
William	*Ben Lyon*
Mary the Second, 1897	*Louise Huff*
Robert	*Ben Lyon*
Richard	*William Hanley*
Mary the Third, 1923	*Louise Huff*
Mother	*Beatrice Terry*
Granny	*May Galyer*
Father	*George Howard*
Bobby	*Morgan Farley*
Lynn	*Ben Lyon*
Hal	*William Hanley*
Lettie	*Mildred McCleod*
Max	*John A. Kirkpatrick*
Nora	*Elinor Montell*

PROLOGUE

MARY THE FIRST

TIME: 1870.

The stage is hung in dark curtains, the center is lighted and the figures which walk into the light are framed by darkness.

An old mahogany sofa, upholstered in black hair cloth, is the only furniture in the scene.

A girl of twenty sits on it—dressed in an evening gown of the period. The skirt voluminous with ruffles and lace. Her arms bosom and shoulders are bare—but the fashion of her hair is demure and maidenly with the proverbial curl and rose.

She fans nervously with her diminutive fan, waiting and watching. She is soft and pretty and flower-like. Her voice is sweet. Shyness and modesty are her manner. Her movements are graceful and coy and mincing—full of a conscious charm.

An orchestra from a seductive distance is playing an enticing polka.

A tall good-looking fellow of twenty-five—in the evening dress of the period—comes quickly into the scene.

MARY. Good gracious! How did you know I was here?

WILLIAM. You told me you would be.

MARY. I didn't! The idea of you thinking such a thing!

WILLIAM [*Heavy, honest and simple minded*] I thought you said as soon as you finished that dance with Hiram, you'd come in here.

MARY. I may have said I *might* but I didn't say I *would.*

WILLIAM. Well, I hoped you would.

MARY. Where's Lucy? I didn't suppose you'd be looking for *me* when you were dancing with *her.*

WILLIAM. I finished.

MARY. Aren't you going to dance this one with her? It's your favorite polka and *now* no one in the world dances the polka so well as Lucy, of course.

WILLIAM. No one but you.

MARY. Oh, that's what you *used* to say. But you can't say that any more. Go on. Don't keep her waiting.

WILLIAM. Who's waiting for *you?*

MARY. I won't tell you.

WILLIAM. It's Hiram. How many times have you danced with him?

MARY. How do I know?

WILLIAM. Every other dance. Is this his, too?

MARY. I'm not dancing with anybody this time. I'm just sitting here resting. It's so sweet and quiet. Listen! Isn't the music sweet? I shall always think of you, William, when I hear that music. We've danced to it so many, many times. Oh, I oughtn't to have said that.

WILLIAM. Why not?

MARY. I mustn't say those things now. And you

must go. There mustn't be any more of these sweet little stolen moments under the stairs. This is really good-bye, William, isn't it?

WILLIAM. No, it's not. Unless *you* want it to be.

MARY. Oh, *me!* Don't say me. What have I to do with it?

WILLIAM. Everything. It all depends on you whether it's good-bye or not.

MARY. Then of course it's good-bye. Dear, dear little Lucy! I hope you'll be happy with her, William. Good-bye. [*Giving him her hand daintily, and drawing it away at once.*]

WILLIAM. What are you goin' on like this for? Nothing's going to be any different for you and me.

MARY. Oh, do you suppose for a minute she'll ever let you dance with me again?

WILLIAM. She can't help herself.

MARY. Oh, you don't know her—as I do. I love Lucy very, *very* dearly. She doesn't mean to be—

WILLIAM. What?

MARY. Nothing. I ought not to have said that.

WILLIAM. Said what? What are you hiding?

MARY. Oh, I'm not *hiding* anything about Lucy. Good gracious! I wouldn't have you think *that* for *any*thing. Oh dear. Oh dear! Rather than have you think that, I'll tell you right out what was on my mind. I only meant that under her sweet little purring ways, she's very, *very* strong and stubborn and always gets what she wants. She won't let you be my dear old friend any more. She's been very cold to me lately and there can't be any reason for it unless it's because she doesn't like you to like me—even a little bit.

WILLIAM. She can't stop that.

MARY. You mustn't say that. It's all over now.

WILLIAM. It never would have been over if you hadn't preferred Hiram and his money.

MARY. Oh, don't blame me. But it *is* over. So let's not talk about it. Let's just be happy for a moment here . . . in this sweet little corner where we've sat so many, many times.

WILLIAM. We'll sit here again sometimes, too. [*Trying to take her hand which she finally allows him to do after a modest struggle.*]

MARY. Oh, never, *never!* I'm not that kind of a girl. You ought to know that, William. You ought to know that I will be loyal to Lucy always—above everything. Nothing shall ever dim my devotion to her. Dear, dear little Lucy! I must be true to her.

WILLIAM. What about being true to me? You can't throw me away like an old shoe—just because I'm getting married. I'm not going to throw you away, let me tell you.

MARY. Oh, but you're a great, big, strong man. You can do as you please and still control your feelings. I'm only a weak little thing. I wouldn't dare try to go on seeing you after you are married. I might not be able to hide my feelings.

WILLIAM. Hide what feelings? What kind of feelings have you got for me, Mary?

MARY [*Turning away and brushing a tear from her cheek*] No kind. Good-bye, William! You must go.

WILLIAM. I won't go until you tell me just what you mean and just how you're feeling.

MARY. No— No—it's too late.

WILLIAM. It's not too late. I'm not tied up yet. We can change things.

MARY. Oh, no—no—Lucy!

WILLIAM. I've got more money than Hiram has now. More than he ever will have. Granddad left me rich, Mary. I'm a rich man now. If I thought you still cared for me the way you once did—nothing could hold me back from getting you.

MARY. Oh, William—William, you mustn't say that. [*Taking the rose from her hair, smelling it and holding it to her lips*] Take this and keep it and look at it sometimes when it's faded and think of me. Perhaps I'll be faded, too. Isn't it pretty?

WILLIAM. Not half so pretty as you are.

MARY. Oh!

WILLIAM. Your cheek is much softer and pinker.

MARY. How can you say such a thing! It couldn't be. See. Look! [*Holding the rose to her cheek and bending near him. He kisses her cheek*] Oh—how could you! How could you, William! Oh—you're hurting my arm! You're going to make it black and blue. There, look at that red spot. Kiss it and make it well. Oh no—I mustn't say that. [*William kisses her forearm, her elbow, her shoulder and her throat.*] Oh, William—you mustn't!

WILLIAM. I won't let anybody else have you. Are you engaged to Hiram?

MARY. Oh, what does it matter?

WILLIAM. I never have loved any other girl. I never will.

MARY. And do you think I've ever loved any other

man? Oh, I ought not to have said that. But I will say it, just this once before we part forever. I loved you as no girl ever loved a man.

WILLIAM. God! [*Bending over her hands and holding them to his lips.*]

MARY. We must be brave, William, and say goodbye.

WILLIAM [*Kneeling before her, his head bowed in her hands.*] I can't—I can't—don't ask it.

MARY. It's too late. You're pledged to another. You must be true to her and live a beautiful life, William.

WILLIAM. I ain't going to do it. You're my fate. I'll blow my brains out if you don't marry me. I'll kill anybody else that gets you.

MARY [*sobbing*] But fate is parting us.

WILLIAM. Look here. I'll have the horses ready in an hour. You go home and put on your riding habit and meet me at the cross-roads in an hour.

MARY. No, no, William. I couldn't—I couldn't.

WILLIAM [*still on his knees*] You've got to. We can't let life treat us like this. We've got to take hold of things. Nothing can stop us. This is meant to be.

MARY. Then it would be wrong to let anything separate us. It's stronger than we are, William. Eternal and beautiful like the stars. But, oh, I can't do it, William. Never—never in this world can I do it. I'm not sure that it would be right. I'll be behind the oak tree. It's bigger than the maple.

WILLIAM [*getting up*] You angel!

MARY. Don't you bring Fleetfoot. I'm afraid of

her. Bring Silver Star. Will you love me forever?

WILLIAM. Forever and ever.

MARY. In this world and the next?

WILLIAM. Longer than eternity.

MARY. There never has been a love as great as this. I feel it. I know it. Oh, William, I love you so! I love you!

[*They are locked in each other's arms; their lips pressed together as the light fades.*]

MARY THE SECOND

TIME: 1897.

The light comes on again and shows the same sofa with a tall, fair, rather æsthetic looking boy standing by it.

He wears evening clothes of the period and is examining closely a dance program, checking off numbers with a small pencil.

An orchestra is playing Sousa's "Washington Post" twostep with great swing and pomp.

A dark boy, more sturdy in appearance, also wearing evening clothes, comes into the scene quickly.

ROBERT [*as he comes on with smiling self-assurance*] Hello, Richard. Who's the dude dancing with Mary?

RICHARD [*with injured dignity*] I thought she was dancing with you.

ROBERT. No, I have this next one with her.

RICHARD. Oh no. *I* have it.

ROBERT. You're off your trolley. It's mine.

RICHARD. You're mistaken. She has it with me.

ROBERT. You better go find her, then. I think I'll wait here [*throwing himself on the sofa*].

RICHARD. You seem to be very sure of yourself.

ROBERT. You bet I'm sure.

RICHARD. You're not going to stay here and make a scene, are you—over a little thing like this?

ROBERT. I haven't anything to make a scene about. I'm just waiting to dance with Mary. If that's painful to you, why not *withdraw* so you won't suffer so much?

[*The orchestra changes to "Daisy Belle" and Robert sings a verse with a gaiety intended to madden Richard.*]

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage—
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look neat—upon the seat—
Of a bicycle built for two.

RICHARD. Oh, don't! It's bad enough to have to dance to anything so vulgar—without hearing the words.

ROBERT. I'm stuck on the words.

RICHARD. You probably are. They're just about suited to your vocabulary.

ROBERT. What's the matter with my vocabulary?

RICHARD. Nothing. I dare say it expresses everything you think—very adequately.

ROBERT. Meaning my intellect is not so colossal as yours.

RICHARD. I couldn't be so rude as that.

ROBERT. Suppose you clear out then before I say something so rude you won't care to hear it.

RICHARD. You're making a fool of yourself.

ROBERT [*Rising quickly*] I'll show you who's the fool!

MARY [*Coming into the scene out of breath*] Oh, I'm

nearly dead! Mamma *made* me dance with that old man.

[*Mary is the perfect Gibson type—in dress and hair and figure.*]

ROBERT. He's got cheek asking you. He must think he's a young masher. Come on, this one is ours.

RICHARD. It's *mine*, Mary.

MARY. Oh—which one *is* it?

ROBERT AND RICHARD. The tenth—a twostep.

MARY. No, this is an extra. Isn't it?

ROBERT. No, it isn't. Let me see your card.

RICHARD. Let *me* see it.

MARY [*Hiding her program*] *No!*

ROBERT [*Showing her his*] Look at this. There it is—the tenth—perfectly plain.

RICHARD [*Showing his card*] Nothing could be plainer than this.

MARY. That's funny. Well—the *next* one is an extra. One of you can have *that*.

ROBERT. It's mine, anyway.

MARY. I'll tell you what let's do. Let's divide *this* one. I'll dance the first half with you, Robert, and the other half with you, Richard.

ROBERT. I don't see why I should give up half my dance.

RICHARD. Oh, give it all to him. You're wasting time talking about it.

MARY. Now boys, don't be silly. I'll stay here and sit it out. The first half is Richard's. Go on Robert. I want to talk to Richard.

ROBERT. Rats! I make myself pretty tired doing this.

MARY. It's a sweet thing for you to do. Ta-ta. [*She turns her back to Richard and blows a small kiss to Robert.*]

ROBERT. I'll be back in a jiffy. [*He goes out.*]

MARY [*Sitting on the sofa*] Now we can talk.

RICHARD. How *could* you?

MARY. How could I what?

RICHARD. I don't care anything about the old program. [*Going to her and tearing the program in two*] I want to know what you said you'd tell me tonight.

MARY. I'm not going to tell you *any*thing when you're in that kind of a humour.

RICHARD. What kind of a humour did you expect me to be in?

MARY. The kind you were last night—when you're different and not like anybody else.

RICHARD. You were different—too—you made me believe you *would* marry me and tonight you've hardly looked at me.

MARY. But I'm thinking every minute.

RICHARD. What are you thinking?

MARY. Life is wonderful. I want to live it wonderfully.

RICHARD. We'll live it wonderfully—together. Our souls are like one soul.

MARY. Yes, but our dispositions aren't. Sometimes we feel alike. When you read poetry to me we're awfully high and exalted, but when we're just going along in an every-day way we aren't a bit alike.

RICHARD. Well, it's better to be alike and feel alike on the heights than in commonplace things that don't matter.

MARY. But I believe they do matter. I wonder which matters the most.

RICHARD. Which are the more important in the world—the great things or the little things?

MARY. Oh, of course, of course—but the trouble is when you do ordinary little things that I don't like, I forget the great ones and I could just—

RICHARD. Just what?

MARY. Just kill you.

RICHARD. But that's your fault, dearest—not mine.

MARY. I wonder. I wonder if it *is* my fault when I hate you and yours when I love you. I do love you sometimes—Richard.

RICHARD. Oh, Mary, we belong to each other. We were *meant* for each other—in our *real* selves.

MARY. But I'm not sure which *is* my real self. You see, Richard, it's this way. Now listen and see if I can make you understand. Sometimes you're the most wonderful thing in the world. You say things that no one else says—and you think and feel and understand—and then sometimes—

RICHARD. It's you who don't understand. Listen dearest—

ROBERT [*Dashing in*] Time's up. Slide, Kelly, slide! You must have said everything you ever thought of by this time.

RICHARD. Oh time doesn't matter. [*Rising slowly*] A minute—or eternity are all alike.

ROBERT. You don't say! I'll take mine done up in sixty minute parcels, thank you—and you've had more than your share. Skip.

RICHARD [*Looking at Mary as he goes*] Eternity.

ROBERT [*After Richard has gone*] Dick's got 'em again. What in the name of Heaven, do you scrape up to talk to him about?

MARY. Oh, lots of things.

ROBERT. Does he spout poetry to you *all* the time?

MARY. It wouldn't hurt you to have a little poetry, too.

ROBERT [*Laughing and sitting beside Mary*] All right. I'll get some. Anything you say. What more do you want me to have?

MARY. You don't think much about—

ROBERT. About what?

MARY. Oh, about things that aren't just *things*.

ROBERT. What?

MARY. You see, you don't even know what I'm talking about.

ROBERT. How can I tell what you're thinking when you don't *say* anything.

MARY. That's just it. You ought to be able to.

ROBERT. Well, all right. I'll find out how it's done if that's what you want.

MARY. Oh!

ROBERT. What's the matter, little girl? I'll give you anything on earth and the moon and stars thrown in. Honest, Mary, no man ever loved a girl the way I love you. And I'll never change. *That's* the point.

MARY. What if you did? It would be horrible.

ROBERT. But I wouldn't. I couldn't. How could

I? You're meant for me. You're mine. We suit each other. Don't you trust me, Mary?

MARY. Oh yes, I trust you—but getting married is forever and ever and ever.

ROBERT. Of course.

MARY. And Oh—unless two people *do* love each other— Oh, in the most wonderful way—that *nothing* can change—

ROBERT. Like us.

MARY. Now listen, Robert. I want to make you understand.

ROBERT [*Taking her in his arms*] You don't need to. I do understand. I know all about it. [*He covers her face with kisses.*] I'll make you the happiest girl in the world. I love you. And we'll never change. Never.

MARY [*Clinging to him*] Oh, if it could be that way, Robert!

ROBERT. Of course it will be that way. Nobody ever loved anybody the way I love you. You're going to marry me, aren't you? You know you are! *Say* it!

MARY. Yes.

ROBERT. Do you love me?

MARY. Oh I do, Robert—and we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world.

[*He folds her in his arms as the light fades.*]

ACT I

MARY THE THIRD

ACT I

TIME: 1922. *Summer.*

PLACE: *The living room in the Robert Hollister house.*

It is the conventional room of conventional success —filled with a certain amount of beauty and comfort produced by money rather than individual taste.

The walls are made by the same draperies used in the first two scenes—with the frames of the doors and windows set in.

The furniture is a mixture of old and new—brought into harmony in dull tones. The sofa that is seen in the first scenes is now upholstered in chintz.

Late afternoon in summer.

AT CURTAIN, *Mary the First at 75, and Mary the Second now 45 are in the room.*

Granny—Mary the First—sits on the sofa, still somewhat the pretty and spoiled darling—still a trace of coquetry in her soft blue frock. She is knitting a blue woolen scarf on large needles. Mother, Mary the Second, grown into a handsome full-blown rose—wears a gown and hat in good style and unobtrusive prettiness. She comes in by the long window—a little warm, a little bored and tired.

MOTHER. Hello, Mother.

GRANNY. Back?

MOTHER. Oh—It's hot! [*Sitting listlessly in a comfortable chair*]

GRANNY [*After an elaborate search for her ball of wool*] Who was there?

MOTHER. Oh, everybody.

GRANNY. Did you have a good time?

MOTHER. Not very.

GRANNY. You're a funny woman, Mary. I don't see why you ever go to a party. You're so indifferent about it.

MOTHER. What else is there to do?

GRANNY. When I was your age I never missed a party. Euchre was a much better game than bridge too. Much more sociable. You could talk all you wanted to, and I usually took the prize.

MOTHER. I'll bet you did, Mother.

GRANNY. Did you play for money?

MOTHER. Yes.

GRANNY. How much did you win?

MOTHER. I lost.

GRANNY. Serves you right. Ladies and gentlemen didn't act like professional gamblers when I was your age. Mary, let me tell you something. From something I heard Mary drop the other day I wouldn't be at all surprised if *she* plays for money too—sometimes.

MOTHER. I shouldn't be surprised if she does.

GRANNY. Do you know she does?

MOTHER. How can she help it, Mother? Everybody else does.

GRANNY. You could put your foot down hard and forbid it.

[*Mother smiles again and reaches for the after-*

noon paper on the low table near her—and opens it indifferently.]

GRANNY. I know Robert doesn't know. Aren't you going to tell him?

MOTHER. I don't think so.

GRANNY. You ought to. At least he'd try to put a stop to it. Robert certainly does *try* to make his children what they ought to be. He certainly tries harder than you do, Mary. Don't you think he'd try if you told him?

[*Mary, reading, doesn't hear.*]

Mary!

MOTHER. Un? What? I beg your pardon, Mother.

GRANNY. I say don't you think Robert would try?

MOTHER. Try what?

GRANNY. Try to put a stop to Mary's playing cards for money, if he knew.

MOTHER. I expect he would. He's tried to put a stop to almost everything else she does.

GRANNY. You don't help him much. You're certainly not bringing your children up the way I brought *you* up.

MOTHER. And do you think you did a good job on me?

GRANNY. At least I did a better one than you're doing on *her*. Look here! [*Drawing a box of cigarettes out from under one pillow and a box of matches from another*] Look here! It isn't enough to have them laid out on every table in the house. They're stuck under everything you touch. I expect to find them in my own bed some night. Why she hasn't set

the house afire long ago I don't see for the life of me.

MOTHER. I don't either.

GRANNY. And look at *this!*

MOTHER. What?

GRANNY. A hole burned right through this sofa by one of those abominable things.

MOTHER. Oh, that's a shame.

GRANNY. I should think it is. It's my *sofa*, too, you know. It came out of Aunt Fannie's house. I sat on it in her house the night I told your father I'd marry him.

MOTHER. Well—that was a great moment for us all, wasn't it?

GRANNY. Yes, it was. You needn't be sarcastic. And here's Mary abusing it. Sitting on it morning, noon and night with boys—boys—*boys*. Do you know how many boys she *has* sat on it with?

MOTHER. No, I don't. I served my time at sitting on it, myself.

GRANNY. That's what I say. All sorts of things have happened on this sofa and here she is treating it like—with no respect at all.

MOTHER. Were you taking care of the sofa when you were sitting on it?

GRANNY. Of course I was. And so were you. I didn't *allow* you to abuse it. You were *taught* to take care of things.

MOTHER. I don't seem to remember that.

GRANNY. Seems to me you're forgetting a great many things you ought to remember. Seems to me you're getting very hard and worldly as you grow older.

MOTHER. Nonsense, Mother! There's nothing hard about *me*. I wish there were.

GRANNY. You wish there were! There you are! That's a hard thing to say. You're getting more like everybody else—callous—just *callous*. You let things slip and you're not holding up strict enough standards to your children.

MOTHER. Yes, I know. Let's not start that, *please*.

GRANNY. There you go! You don't care a fig about what I say. There was a time when people thought what I said was of some importance, and listened to it—too.

MOTHER. Oh Mother dear, I *do* listen.

GRANNY. You have no more respect for my opinion than that. [*Flicking her fingers*]

BOBBY [*Dashing in from the outside*] Mother are you through with the car?

MOTHER. Y-e-s—but what do you—

BOBBY. I left my racket out at the club. I want to dash out and get it. [*He starts out and turns back.*] Oh Granny, another button's busted off this coat. Will you sew it on please? [*Putting it on the table.*]

GRANNY. Yes, dearie. Don't put it there. Give it to me. You can't put anything down in this house if you ever expect to get it back.

BOBBY [*Going to give her the button*] See—it came off here and it sort of took a chunk of the coat with it.

GRANNY. You bad thing! I s'pose I can darn it. Here, you keep it. I mended sixteen pairs of socks for you this morning.

BOBBY. Thanks.

MOTHER. Mind you're back in time for dinner Bobby. Your father will probably want the car to-night.

BOBBY. I'll hurry.

MOTHER. And don't drive too fast Bobby.

GRANNY. I'll never go with you again if you drive the way you did yesterday.

BOBBY. Oh you think anything over five miles an hour is too fast. [*He hurries out.*]

GRANNY. Bobby's a sweet child but he's getting to be a ripsnorter too,—just about as bad as Mary. Both of them are as wild as colts.

MOTHER. Well—after all they're my children and if I don't mind the things they do I don't know why you should.

GRANNY. Your children! Anybody would think I hadn't brought up a family of children of my own.

MOTHER. I expect you were a much better mother than I am, dear.

GRANNY. I *know* I was. You're shutting your eyes to things that are right under your nose. Robert does try. I will say that for him. Robert's peculiar in some ways, but I must say he does try to bring up his children right.

MOTHER. [*Seeing a letter on the desk and opening it to read*] Robert is always right.

GRANNY. I don't say that. But he certainly is as right as most men are. As men go, he's a very fine man. You're a very fortunate woman.

MARY. As women go, I suppose I am.

GRANNY. I sometimes think you don't appreciate him, Mary. I sometimes do.

MOTHER. I've spent my life appreciating Robert.

GRANNY. I don't know why you wouldn't . . . a man who has succeeded as he has and put you in this beautiful house.

MOTHER [*Sitting at the desk to write a note*] He certainly did *put* me in it.

GRANNY. Un? What do you mean by that? You're getting so sort of nifty and highty-tighty lately I don't know what you mean half the time.

MOTHER. Well, I don't mean much of anything. I wouldn't worry about that.

GRANNY. You're not living up to the principles I brought you up with.

MOTHER. Mother—if you'd only acknowledge that what you brought me up with hasn't any more to do with the case now than I have with the North Pole—and stop stewing about it—you'd be a much happier person.

GRANNY. Why Mary McDougal Hollister! That I should live to hear you say that! What's happened to you? You're different lately. What is it? Is anything wrong?

MOTHER. Everything's just exactly as it always was.

GRANNY. I should hope so. You're a happy woman. If you're not, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. When I was your age, it was the fashion to be happy. Women loved their husbands and appreciated their blessings. Or if they didn't they didn't air it from the house-tops.

MOTHER. No—they just lied along and covered things up.

GRANNY. Well land knows *you* haven't anything to cover up. That's one sure thing. [*A pause.*] Have you?

MOTHER. [*Sealing her letter and getting up*] Of course not.

GRANNY. Then what's the use acting as if you had? The thing for you to think about is your children and how to keep them from being contaminated by the terrible things that are going on. You aren't half strict enough with Mary. I tell you she's in danger —actual downright danger, and you don't seem to see it at all.

MOTHER. We're *all* in danger. You're in danger of becoming a fussy old woman. I'm in danger of being swamped by the hateful ugliness of—respectable —every day life. If Mary's got anything more dangerous than that to face, she'll wriggle through somehow, I s'pose. [*Taking her hat and going to the hall door.*]

GRANNY. And make a muddle of it. *She* doesn't know what's good for her. It's your business to make her see who's the right one for her to marry, and make her marry him.

MOTHER. Did your mother make you marry Father?

GRANNY. She didn't have to. I *knew* he was the best and I took him. Didn't I help you to take Robert?

MOTHER. No, you didn't, and I didn't take him—I

was taken. Mary won't be taken—and she won't take. She wants something different.

GRANNY. Wants? Wants? What does she want?

MOTHER. Something that *comes*. Something you nor I ever had.

GRANNY. I think you're out of your head lately! I'm going to take Mary in hand myself.

MOTHER. No you won't, Mother. I must ask you, please—to let Mary alone.

MARY [*Coming in quickly through one of the long windows*] Mother—I've got a great scheme.

[*Mary is twenty—slender and straight as a boy. She wears a slip of a frock—which leaves her free—and she vibrates with vitality and eagerness—rather dynamically interested in her own affairs. She pitches her hat into a chair as she comes in.*]

MOTHER. Have you, dear? What?

MARY. Some of us are going camping—Lettie and Max and Lynn and Hall and I—and do all our own cooking and cleaning up and everything—and see how really awfully well and decently we *can* do it. We think—we know, in fact—it's the best way in the world—the only way to really know each other—you know—to see each other all the time—in a sort of messy way—doing things we don't like to do—and sort of getting right down at realities you know—vital stuff.

MOTHER. I see. But why do you want to know each other so well? Why take such risks?

GRANNY. I think as much! It's hard enough to like anybody when they're all dressed up and on their

good behavior, let alone when they're all dirty and eating bad food.

MARY. That's just it, Granny. That's the point exactly. It's a magnificent test.

MOTHER. But why not let well enough alone?

MARY. Because you see—some of us—all of us, in fact—are in love with some of the others—and we're going to take this way of finding out—just what kind of love it is, and what we're going to do with it. See?

GRANNY. You take my advice and pick out the best one and stay at home with him, and wear your good clothes every day.

MARY [*Going to Granny to chuck her under the chin*] I bet you were the worst kind of a vamp, Granny.

GRANNY. I was a very modest maidenly girl, through and through and *through*.

MOTHER. Who's going with you? Who are the chaperones, I mean.

MARY. That's the point. We're not going to have any.

MOTHER. Oh—

GRANNY. What?

MARY. It would be the same old thing if we did and put the whole scheme on the blink.

MOTHER. But you don't mean—

MARY. Nobody would be natural. It would be the cut and dried conventional stuff and that's just what we don't want. We want to see each other as we really *are*.

GRANNY. You mean go way off alone—boys and girls *together*—without any older people?

MARY. Yes.

GRANNY. Are you stark staring crazy?

MARY. Not at all. I think it's a great idea. People don't *know* each other before they're married. That's why most marriages are merely disappointing experiments instead of lifetime mating. That's why the experimenting ought to be done *before* marriage.

MOTHER. We'll talk about it after while, dear.

MARY. Oh Mother—why wait to *talk?*

GRANNY. Yes, *why?* Tell her now that it's an unheard of, immoral, *disgraceful* idea to have even come into a nice girl's head. Tell her that—this minute.

MOTHER. Wait, Mother.

MARY. Immoral? Disgraceful? Why, pray? Why?

GRANNY. Because it outrages all the decencies. What would you do at night, I'd like to know?

MARY. We'd go to bed and sleep—as decently as we do at home in our own beds.

MOTHER. Now, now, dear.

MARY. If you can't think of anything but *that* Granny, you *have* got an evil mind.

MOTHER. Mary!

MARY. We aren't going away just so we can sleep together. We could stay right at home and do that, let me tell you.

MOTHER. Mary!

GRANNY [*Rising in shocked excitement*] Are you going to *do* something? Don't you know *now* you must do something, or are you just going to go on sitting still?

MOTHER. Mother, will you *please* let me—

MARY. If I could just talk to Mother alone once, Granny, without you interfering, I might be able to make her understand something.

MOTHER. Mary—be quiet! Aren't you ashamed to speak to your Grandmother like that?

GRANNY. No, she's not. There's no shame in her. She's brazen and disrespectful and you *let* her be.

MARY. She isn't *letting* me be *any*thing. I'm myself, Granny. Can't you understand that? And I'm talking about something very important to me which you don't understand at all.

MOTHER. Mary—that will *do*, I say. Tell your grandmother you're sorry, and don't let this happen again.

MARY [*Going to Granny reluctantly*] I'm sorry, Granny. I really am. I didn't mean to be disrespectful. Will you forgive me?

GRANNY [*Bursting into tears*] No, I won't. You're an impertinent little minx, and I don't want you to speak to me.

MOTHER. Oh Mother dear, don't take it that way.

MARY. I said I was sorry.

GRANNY. Don't touch me! Nobody loves me. Nobody appreciates me.

MARY. Please forgive me.

GRANNY. Let me alone. You've broken my heart. [*She goes out into the hall sobbing.*]

MOTHER. Now see what you've done.

MARY [*Closing the door*] Grandmother's the limit. She really is.

MOTHER. She's dear and sweet, and you have no business to say wild things you know will shock her.

MARY. What's wild about what I said?

MOTHER. You know as well as I do. Decent people don't *do* those things.

MARY [*Throwing herself on the sofa*] Because they don't is no reason it wouldn't be a darned good idea if they did.

MOTHER. Oh—*dearest!*

MARY. If nobody ever did anything that had never been done before we'd be a sweet set of dubs. People are dull enough as it is, goodness knows—without setting that up as the law to live by.

MOTHER. You're talking from very lofty heights. Unfortunately we have to live in the valleys of common sense.

MARY. That's the way you always get out of everything, Mother. I want to *try* things. What else is life for?

MOTHER. You can't try things the whole world knows have nothing but danger and disaster in them.

MARY. Do you mean to say I couldn't go any place with anybody and not stay *myself*—just as I am now—unless I *wanted* to be something else? And then if I wanted to why of course I *would*, and that would be my own affair anyway.

MOTHER. Mary! Stop it. If I thought for a minute, you *meant* that stuff, I'd be terribly frightened. But you don't.

MARY. Certainly I mean it. And I've just about decided that free love is the only solution to the whole business anyway.

MOTHER. What on earth are you talking about?

MARY. I don't know that I *could* live all my life

with one man—however much I loved him. Of course you and Father are satisfied with each other because you've never had anything else. But you don't know *what* you might have been, Mother, if you'd lived with a lot of men. Experience—constructive experience is the only developing progressive thing in the world.

MOTHER. There's nothing new about the relations between men and women and there's nothing true or right but the same old things that have always been true. I'm afraid you've been reading too much new stuff—trying to be clever and advanced. Don't, dear—don't.

MARY. Gosh, Mother—you don't suppose anything I've read in a book cuts any ice? I'm talking about *me* myself, and how I feel and what I want. Hal and Lynn both have qualities that attract me enormously—and I want to find out if I want to marry either one of them. I wouldn't be satisfied to be happy just in the way you and Father are happy. I want something that is beautiful, and beautiful all the time.

MOTHER. Nothing is beautiful *all* the time. If you're going on a quest for that you might as well stay at home.

MARY. Mother, are you and Father really happy?

MOTHER [*Startled*] Of course! Why on earth do you say that?

MARY. Lots and lots of times I— Nothing.—

MOTHER. What do you mean?

MARY. There isn't anything really wrong, is there? You do love each other, don't you?

MOTHER [*Evading Mary's eyes*] Don't be silly. Of course we do. Now see here, Mary—you can't expect me to take your scheme seriously. . . .

MARY. But I do. What if I must do it, Mother? What if I must to *express* myself—to find myself? After all, it's my life, you know.

MOTHER. Mary, if you'll promise me to stop thinking about this nonsense I won't tell your Father, but if you don't—I will—and he'll—I don't know *what* he will do.

MARY. I do. I know every snort and gesture but that won't make any difference if I think my happiness—

[*Lynn comes through the lower window followed by Hal. Lynn is the prototype of Robert Hollister—Hal of Richard, seen in the prologue.*]

LYNN. Hello, Mary! Hello, Mrs. Hollister!

MARY. Hello, Lynn!

MOTHER. Hello.

HAL. Hello.

MARY. Come in—come in. Pray do.

HAL. What's the matter?

MARY. I've just told Mother the scheme.

LYNN. It doesn't seem to have made a hit.

MOTHER. It's too silly to talk about. You two boys ought to be men of the world enough to make Mary realize how impossible it is—instead of putting such ideas into her head.

MARY. They didn't, Mother. I put them into theirs.

MOTHER. Then get them out. I trust you, boys, you know, and when I come back into this room I ex-

pect you both to give me your word of honor that the whole thing is off.

[*She goes out—closing the door*]

MARY. Mother's difficult because she's so nice. Give me a light—somebody.

[*Going to sit on the sofa and taking a cigarette. Both boys strike matches and sit—one on either side of her, lighting their own cigarettes.*]

MARY. [*Going on after a long puff and throwing back her head to blow the smoke—crossing her legs and folding her arms*] It's almost impossible to talk to her or get anywhere with her, because she's a perfectly happy inexperienced woman, the most dangerous kind.

LYNN. Dangerous? I wouldn't exactly call your mother dangerous.

MARY. She's dangerous because she's contented, and therefore not progressive—stupid.

LYNN. Oh.

HAL. [*Slowly and importantly*] Of course—I get that.

MARY. And she represents such an awful lot of women. They haven't moved an inch for ages.

LYNN. Your mother's a peach, though.

MARY. Of course she is—a perfect darling. I'm crazy about her. That's why this thing is so hard.

LYNN. Then give it up. Hang it, I'm not so mad about it, you know.

MARY. I knew you'd be the first one to back out.

HAL. So did I.

LYNN. I'm not backing out.

HAL. Yes, you are. Give it up, old man. It's not your gait anyway. Just drop it.

LYNN. And let you stick? Not much. Don't worry about my gait. I'll keep up all right.

MARY. Is the first thing that Mother says going to knock it all out of you?

LYNN. No—but people are going to talk like blazes and I can't stand to have you talked about, Mary.

MARY. Oh Lord, Lynn! Do we have to begin all over to convince you?

HAL. You see, old man, you're not really with us. You're only going because you don't want to be left out. You don't see it as something important to the improvement of the whole question of love and marriage.

LYNN. Take it from me, Max and Lettie aren't up in the clouds the way you two are—you're fooling yourselves there—*hard.*

HAL. I don't agree with you. I think Mary and I have succeeded in making them see that—that—

LYNN. That what?

HAL. That if they haven't the courage to lead their own lives regardless of other people's moth-eaten convictions—they will never get anywhere or be any further along than their fathers and mothers.

MARY. Of course, to me it's thrilling—positively thrilling. I've never done anything in my life that I like so much. It's so simple—so absolutely simple—merely to go off and live naturally and freely for two weeks—doing a thing we know in the bottom of our souls is *right*, and knowing perfectly well the whole

town is going to explode with horror. Then we'll march back again with our heads well up and prove that we're finer and more intelligent people than we were before we went away. I think it's big—you know.

LYNN. Y-e-s—but what if it never was understood and accepted. It would be terribly hard on you two girls.

HAL. Even so—it would be worth it. They'd both be doing something great. Wreckage of the individual doesn't count in the world's work.

LYNN. Not so long as the *other* fellow happens to be the wreck.

MARY. Now listen. We've all reached the point where we think it's worth doing. I've even decided I *must* do it—in spite of mother. But if we're going to get away with it, we've got to do it quickly before the others back out and spill the whole business. I think we'd better go tonight—after the party. We'll all be out late—anyway—and nobody watching the time and expecting us. I'll get word to Letitia, and we can pack now and put the stuff in—in your garage, Lynn, and all start off together.

HAL. Great!

LYNN. No—we've got to be foxy getting out of the garage—not get together till we're out of town—then when we're out on the road, let 'er go.

MARY. I can hardly wait! And now—you boys have to promise me—utterly and absolutely—that you won't make love to me the whole time we're gone. It's going to be a square deal for everybody, and don't forget this—I may not want to marry either one of you—

and you may not want to marry me after all. You *do* understand—don't you?

HAL. *I* do. Certainly. You're magnificent, Mary. If we haven't enough of your spirit in us to rise to this we're rotters. If you *do* find that Lynn's the one to make you happy I shall understand and if I can't take you by the hand, old man, and wish you luck—I shall be horribly disappointed in myself.

LYNN. And if the same thing happens to *me*, I hope I'll have the guts to clear out and not stop to wish anything on anybody.

MARY [*Getting up and standing between them*] You're splendid—both of you. Shake. [*The boys clasp hands and she puts hers over theirs.*] Skip now before Mother comes back—and avoid the issue. Bye-bye—see you tonight.

[*The boys go. Mary goes to the hall door—about to open it. Hal comes back.*]

HAL. [*In a whisper*] Mary!

MARY. Oh!—I thought you'd gone.

HAL. Just a minute.

MARY. What do you want?

[*They go to the sofa and sit. Mary turns on the light in the lamp which is behind the sofa—the rest of the room is in shadow—with the same effect as in the scenes in the prologue.*]

HAL. I just want to say this, dear—that whatever happens—I'll be with you and you can count on me and my love—and above all on my *friendship.*

MARY. I know I can, old dear. I know that and it gives me such a wonderful feeling of security—your understanding, I mean.

HAL. That's what I wanted to be sure of. That you *do* feel that.

MARY. Oh I do—I do.

HAL. Of course I know your soul belongs to *me*, Mary—whatever happens. We may get lost from each other, and confused and entangled—but *that* will remain through eternity—that our souls have found each other and understood.

MARY. Yes, I know dear. I know.

HAL. And I'm sure of *you—now* in reality. No love as great as mine could fail to find its completion. *You* will be sure too. I'm not afraid. I love you, Mary. I love you as no man ever loved before.

MARY. If I were sure of that!

HAL. You *will* be. Will you kiss me, Mary, as a consecration to our ideal?

MARY. Of course.

[*She kisses him with a very honest and unfeeling smack on the lips.*]

HAL. [*Rising with a sigh*] That will live through eternity.

[*He goes. Mary goes to the door again. Lynn comes to the other window.*]

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. Oh—I thought you'd gone.

LYNN. [*Coming in*] I waited. I knew Hal would come back to say something. Just a minute, Mary. Come here. [*They sit on the sofa*] I came back to say this—that if I wasn't *dead sure* I'm going to get you, I wouldn't go a *step* on this tom fool expedition.

MARY. Now—

LYNN. Listen! I'm going to take care of you and

pull this thing off *right*, and you're going to come back engaged to *me*.

MARY. Now if you're going with any fixed ideas you can't go at all. It's going to be growth and freedom.

LYNN. I don't need to grow. I *know* what *I* want. I love you.

MARY. But that isn't enough. You don't know that it will last forever.

LYNN. Of *course* it will. When people love the way *I* do, it's *got* to last. You *do* love me, don't you?

MARY. Yes—I do—in a way—very, very much. But not in *all* ways. It isn't the great love that embraces everything—that envelops and sweeps one away—so there's no doubt about anything.

LYNN. Tell me how much you do love me and I'll take a chance on the rest.

MARY. I think—I *think* I'd rather you were the father of my children than any man I ever saw.

LYNN. Well then what difference does anything else make?

MARY. But that isn't everything.

LYNN. What else *is* there?

MARY. Beautiful—mystic—far away things. Please go. I'm afraid Mother will come and spoil everything.

LYNN. [*Catching her hand*] Kiss me.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Why not?

MARY. I don't want to.

LYNN. Well if I've got to act like a dead man for two weeks—you might kiss me once—now.

MARY. No.

LYNN. [*Taking her by the arms*] You've *got* to!

MARY. If you do I'll hate you.

LYNN. Did you kiss Hal?

MARY. None of your business.

LYNN. But *did* you!

MARY. [*Pulling away from him*] Do you want Mother to catch you here? Don't! I'll run around the house and get upstairs.

[*She darts out the upper window and Lynn the lower. After a moment Mother opens the hall door and comes in—turning on the lights. She hesitates, is about to go back into the hall when Bobby comes in quickly through the lower window.*]

BOBBY. Mother—have you got seventeen dollars? I need it quick.

MOTHER. No. Why?

BOBBY. I ran into a fellow and smashed his fender. He'll settle for that and keep quiet and I can get 'em at the garage to fix our car tonight—if you'll keep Dad from wanting it.

MOTHER. Oh Bobby—*again*! This is awful.

BOBBY. It's hell. Have you got the seventeen?

MOTHER. I don't know. I don't think so.

BOBBY. Go see—please, Ma, and it'll be all right. The fellow's waitin' 'round the corner.

MOTHER. But I don't believe—

FATHER. [*Coming in through the window*] Bobby, a fellow out at the gate asked me if you'd just come in here. What does he want?

[*Robert Hollister is fifty—a solid successful man with a very agreeable manner when he is agreeable, and*

a man who, not so successful and sure, might have been a very delightful person.]

BOBBY. Oh—he—just—He's got a car out there he wants to show me.

FATHER. Indeed! That will be profitable to him.

BOBBY. Well—I guess I can *look* at it—can't I?

FATHER. [*Going to the desk, where he sits turning on the light and opening his paper*] I guess you can. Why don't you go out and look? You can't see it in here, can you?

BOBBY. I'm going.

[*He looks expressively at Mother and she starts to the door as Granny comes in.*]

GRANNY. [*Her pride and her feathers still somewhat ruffled*] Is that child in here? Because if she is, I won't come in a step.

FATHER. What's the matter with *you*, Granny?

GRANNY. [*Sitting on the sofa*] A good deal. I want to talk to you, Robert.

MOTHER. A—don't talk to him now, Mother.

GRANNY. Why not? Can't I even *talk* when I want to?

BOBBY. Mother! Ahem!

[*Mother looks at Bobby who nods frantically for her to go.*]

MOTHER. Robert's tired now. Wait till after dinner.

FATHER. Let's get it over with now—whatever it is. I'd like to rest after dinner. I want a long ride. Bobby, you get the car out and have it here so I won't lose any time. We'll all go for a long ride in the country.

BOBBY. Yes, Father.

MOTHER. Oh—that's too bad, Robert.

FATHER. What's too bad?

MOTHER. I promised the car to someone else this evening.

FATHER. You did? And what in the name of common sense did you do that for when you know it's the only recreation I have? The only way I can cool off and get a good night's sleep.

MOTHER. But it's for a poor sick woman who has *no* way of getting out.

FATHER. She *hasn't*? Well, I haven't either. I'd be a poor sick man if I didn't have *some* little outing. You don't seem to have thought of that. Is the poor sick woman going to drive my car herself?

MOTHER. No—Bobby's going to take her.

FATHER. Then take her for half an hour, Bobby, and be back here sharp—understand?

BOBBY. Yes, Father.

[*Mother starts to the door again. Granny snivels.*]

FATHER. Now, Granny, what is it? Out with it.

GRANNY. She—

MOTHER. Bobby, bring me a handkerchief out of my top bureau drawer—in the box in the right hand corner. You know, you can get it.

[*Bobby suddenly understanding starts to the hall door.*]

FATHER. How about that fellow waiting out there?

BOBBY. I'll see him as soon as I get Mother's handkerchief.

FATHER. [*To Granny*] Has Mary been doing something to upset you again?

GRANNY. She—

MOTHER. Oh, she didn't mean to, Mother. She didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

GRANNY. Oh, never mind my feelings. I'm used to that. I think Robert ought to know things and I think it's my duty to tell him. You're so slack yourself. Mary's very slack, Robert.

FATHER. What have you been slack about now, Mary?

MOTHER. Mother doesn't realize that girls can't be *just* the way they were when she was a girl.

GRANNY. Fiddlesticks! Right and wrong haven't changed a bit and no amount of angling and twisting and dodging can get away from facts.

FATHER. Well—well—what are the facts in this case? Come to the point.

GRANNY. Mary's got—

MOTHER. Please, don't talk about it *now*. I'll tell Father at the right time.

GRANNY. The right time! The right time is *now* this minute, before any harm's done. Putting things off is your worst—

FATHER. For heaven's sake, what *is* it? [*They both start to talk.*] Now don't both talk at once. Christopher! It's enough to be in court all day without hearing cases all night, too. What is it? Now you first, Mary. Wait, Mother.

GRANNY. Oh yes, I can wait. I'm used to that.

MOTHER. It's only a very foolish idea Mary has in her head, and I know I can get it out if I go at it in the right way—without making a row about it.

GRANNY. That's what you always say, Mary,—

and it don't very often succeed, so far as I can see. This time it's too serious to fool with. It's got to be nipped in the bud.

FATHER. There's a good deal in what your mother says, you know, Mary. You *are* pretty soft and undecided. That's your besetting sin.

MOTHER. If anybody's *hard* with her now it *will* be serious. It's got to be handled very carefully. She believes she's right with all her—

GRANNY. Shucks! She doesn't anything of the kind. It's a dangerous—

MOTHER. That's why we must avoid the danger and—

FATHER. Now see here Mary. Tell me what it is and I'll settle it without any squeamish nonsense. What danger is she in?

GRANNY. That's the way to talk, Robert. I knew you'd settle it. You tell him the truth Mary, or I will.

FATHER. [*Looking at Mother*] Well—

MOTHER. It's already settled.

FATHER. Un?

MOTHER. It's all right. She won't do it.

FATHER. Won't do what?

GRANNY. How do you know she won't?

MOTHER. Because I know. I trust her.

MARY. [*Coming in quickly from the hall*] Mother, will you hook me, please?

[*She wears a charming evening gown—very simple. Her lovely young body is free and somewhat exposed. An evening cape is thrown over her arm*]

MARY. Hello, Father.

FATHER. Hello, daughter.

MARY. I got all my bills straight, Dad—and I haven't overdrawn my allowance a penny for three months. Pretty good—un?

FATHER. Yes, I must say you do pretty well in that line. You've got a good mind if you'd just use it—instead of throwing it away.

MARY. What makes you think I'm throwing it away?

FATHER. I wouldn't have to *think* much to see that.

MARY. I think you have a perfectly corking mind, Father—but you don't always use it the way I think you ought to.

FATHER. And what's this I hear about some new idea you have in your head?

MOTHER. Robert—*please!*

[*Father shrugs his shoulders and goes back to his paper.*]

MARY. Mother, your hands are shaking. Can't you find the hooks?

GRANNY. I don't know why she couldn't. There's nothing to the whole dress *but* the hooks.

MARY. Are you still cross at me, Granny? I'm awfully sorry. I'll be good.

GRANNY. I don't know how you can expect to be good in that dress.

MARY. What's the matter with this dress? It's a love. Isn't it, Mother?

MOTHER. It's very pretty, dear.

GRANNY. Yes, you uphold her in her nakedness, instead of making her put on clothes enough.

MARY. Oh Granny!

GRANNY. I'll wager you haven't got a sign of a petticoat on.

MARY. Of course I haven't.

FATHER [*Looking over his paper*] What's the reason you haven't?

MARY. Heavens—nobody wears a petticoat, Father.

GRANNY. I do. Look at her. She might just as well be stark naked for all the good her clothes are doing her.

MARY. You needn't talk, Granny. I think it's much better to show my back than the way you used to show your front. Thanks, dearest. [*As her mother holds the cape.*]

[*A whistle is heard from outside.*]

That's Lynn. Good night, everybody. Good night, Granny. [*Kissing Granny's cheek*]

Good night, Dad. [*Kissing the top of his head*]

Good night, Mother dear. [*Putting her arms around her mother*]

FATHER. Where are you going?

MARY. To Lettie's for dinner and a dance at the club afterwards.

FATHER. What time will you be in?

MARY. Why—I don't know.

FATHER. I don't want it to be so late as it was last night, mind you. Understand?

MARY. Yes Father.

FATHER. And listen to me—if you've got any *new* kind of daredevil recklessness in your head, you get it out or you'll reckon with me. Understand?

MARY. Yes Father.

GRANNY. Aren't you going to put anything over your head?

MARY. Goodness no, Granny. It's roasting.

GRANNY. Mary, are you going to let her go out in the night air without putting anything on her head?

MARY. Oh—

FATHER. Put something over your head. Do you hear?

MARY. I haven't anything to *put.*

MOTHER [*Snatching up the scarf Granny was knitting*] Here, dear.

GRANNY. My fascinator! You'll ravel it all out.

MOTHER. I'll fasten it, Mother. It won't hurt it a bit. Good night, dear.

GRANNY. How do you know she won't take it off the minute she's out of sight?

MOTHER [*Holding Mary*] Because I trust her—always—anywhere.

MARY. Good night, Mother dear. You *are* a darling.

[*Mary starts out. She comes back impulsively throwing her arms about her mother.*]

MOTHER. What is it, dearest?

MARY. Nothing. Good night.

[*She kisses her mother and goes out quickly. Bobby has come back through the upper window during this scene and sits sprawling in a chair.*]

GRANNY. Where's your mother's handkerchief, Bobby?

BOBBY. Oh—I forgot. I went out to see the fella.

GRANNY. I'll wager it wasn't a handkerchief she sent you for at all. I expect it was something else—something you ought not to have.

FATHER. What's that?

[*Mother moves a chair up to the desk and sits with her back to Father as she reads.*]

GRANNY. I say I expect—

FATHER. I heard what you said. What have you been doing, Bobby?

BOBBY. Nothing.

FATHER. What about the fellow's car? What did you think of it?

BOBBY. Oh—I didn't think much of it.

FATHER [*Still looking over the paper*] I got the repair bills today on *my* car and by Jove if they aren't cut in two this next month, I'll sell the damn thing. I never saw anything like it.

BOBBY. Well, I don't make the bills, Father.

FATHER. Oh no. The car just walks out and gets itself out of commission. I'll sell it I tell you. I'm not made of money, you know. All the bills were terrific this month, Mary. Something's got to be done.

GRANNY. Well, I don't run up the bills. I'm a *very* little eater if you mean *me*, Robert.

FATHER. I don't mean anybody. But you might control things, Mary, and keep them within bounds.

MARY. Oh I do try to, Robert—I do.

GRANNY. You're not as careful a housekeeper as I was, Mary.

MOTHER. No—and eggs aren't ten cents a dozen now, either.

FATHER. We've got to cut down. That's all there is about it.

BOBBY. That's what you always say the first day of the month, Dad.

FATHER. The whole country's going to collapse if we don't look out—with this reckless extravagance. Everybody's living beyond their income—everybody. Same wild looseness there is in every other direction. There's a general lowering of standards and ideals that is undermining society and civilization.

GRANNY. That's just what I was saying to Mary this afternoon. She don't see it. She don't see it creeping into her own children.

FATHER. Creeping in—striding in, you mean.

GRANNY. Yes, that's it.

MOTHER. You can't expect your own children to be different from other people's, you know.

FATHER. I do expect it, by Jove. If I had my way they would be. If I had my way they'd all be at home this evening.

GRANNY. That's what I say. It certainly is a lovely, *lovely happy* home, and they ought all to be *in* it.

NORA [*A neat maid—opening the hall door*] Dinner is served.

MOTHER. There's dinner and you two aren't ready. Run along, Bobby and get ready for dinner—and *hurry*. Why *will* you two *always* wait till dinner is on the table before you move? Hurry, Bobby, *hurry*. [*Bobby rises and shambles out.*] Come Robert.

FATHER. It might wait a little for me.

MOTHER. You simply *cannot* have decent food and

keep it waiting. You've done it all your life and it's terribly irritating.

FATHER [*Rising reluctantly*] I have to rush all day. I would like peace and relaxation at home.

MOTHER. Here's your hat, Robert.

FATHER [*As he goes into the hall*] I don't want it.

GRANNY [*Trotting after him*] We're going to have chicken tonight, and I declare it is a shame we aren't all here to eat it. I do believe in a family all being 'round the table together when night comes.

[*Mother ends the procession—going out with Father's hat as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE: *The scene is dark, showing a motor, a roadster, facing the audience. The whir of the motor is heard.* LYNN, MARY *and* HAL *are in the car.* LYNN *is driving.* MARY *sits next him and* HAL *beside her.*

MARY. She's only going forty. Step on her, Lynn.

LYNN. Are Max and Lettie right behind us?

HAL. Yes, they're sticking.

MARY. Oh, isn't it wonderful! I never was so happy in my life!

LYNN. We're ten miles out now. Ought to do it in three hours.

MARY. Easy! Isn't it wonderful driving at night when nobody gets in the way!

HAL. Everything's wonderful when nobody gets in the way.

MARY. Now she's sixty! Gosh, isn't it great!

HAL. You can't keep this up, Lynn.

LYNN. What's the reason I can't? She's just beginning.

HAL. For God's sake, don't stop or turn. They're right behind us.

MARY. I hope you're not afraid, Hal.

HAL. Of course I'm not. But there is a limit, you know.

LYNN [*Bending over the wheel*] No there isn't! Gee, it feels good to let her out!

MARY. It's marvelous! I never was so alive before. Isn't it glorious to know nothing can stop us! We're free! I feel as if we were part of the wind and sky. I think we're going right on up, through the sky, into the stars.

HAL. Yes, we may do that sooner than you think For Heaven's sake, let up a little, Lynn. You've lost your head.

LYNN. Not a bit! She's a good little wagon. This is easy for 'er.

MARY. Don't spoil it, Hal. This is the way everything always ought to be—going with all we've got and nobody saying "*don't.*" Oh, aren't you glad we did it? Don't you know now we're right, Lynn?

LYNN. *This* part of it's all right.

HAL. Of course we're right. But let's go slow enough to enjoy it.

MARY. But, Hal, I thought this was what you wanted, moving swiftly, alone, leaving the world behind. The world's asleep and we're running away from it out into the unknown.

HAL. This isn't spiritual exaltation. This is just reckless foolhardiness. Not what *I* came for.

LYNN. Do you want us to let you out?

HAL. Don't be funny.

MARY. Buck up, Hal. You're *free!* For the first time in your life.

HAL. There goes my hat!

MARY. Never mind. What's a hat?

HAL. You're doing everything you can to queer the whole idea.

LYNN. I'm taking you *to* the idea as fast as I can. Do you want to go back and get your hat?

MARY. Shut up, boys! This is glorious! Doesn't everything we've left seem a thousand times worse and more ordinary and piffling than it ever did before? Oh, there's a rabbit! Don't hit him, Lynn. Oooo! [*Screaming and hiding her face against Hal*]

LYNN. Look out, boy! Whew! Never touched him.

HAL. Stop it, Lynn! I can't *stand* it!

LYNN. Nothing to be afraid of.

MARY. He can't help it. Shut your eyes, Hal, and put your head on my shoulder.

LYNN. Here, here, none of that. Where's your nerve, Hal?

MARY. He's got a great deal more nerve about some things than you have. Gee, if you were both mixed up together into one man you'd be pretty good. See the stars. We *are* going up—up—right into them. This is life! Go on, Lynn! *Step on her!* [*Lynn bends lower over the wheel with a set face. Hal is holding on, sick with fear. Mary sits between them, her head thrown back, ecstatically happy.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE II

TIME: *4 o'clock the next morning.*

PLACE: *The living room again.*

AT CURTAIN: *The light of early morning comes through the windows. After a moment five figures are seen crossing the upper window outside. They come to the lower window. Hal opens it cautiously and comes in quickly, carrying Mary's suit case which he puts on the floor above the chair at left C. Lynn carries Mary in. Letitia and Max follow. Letitia is a pretty girl of the flapper type. She wears Max's top coat over her evening gown and his cap on her bobbed hair. Max is a rather flamboyant and good-looking youth. The three boys are in evening clothes.*

HAL. Put her over here, Lynn. [*Lynn puts the limp Mary in the arm chair at the left. The others come close, bending over her.*]

LETITIA [*Kneeling beside Mary*] How are you now, honey?

HAL. Don't try to talk, Mary. How do you feel?

LETITIA. Thank goodness we got her home! I never was so frightened in my life. I thought you were going to die, Peaches.

HAL. How is the pain now, dear? Just as bad?

LYNN. Mary, I'm going to call a doctor.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Then I'm going to call your mother.

MARY. No!

LETITIA. Yes, we will. We must, honey. It's perfectly awful to see you like this.

MARY. No!

LYNN. Then how *is* the pain?

MARY [*Suddenly sitting up*] There never was a pain.

THE OTHERS. What?

MARY. I didn't have a bit.

THE OTHERS. What?

LETITIA. She's out of her head. Don't you know me, lamb? It's Tish.

MARY. I wanted to get you home. I knew I must do something desperate, so I had appendicitis.

LETITIA. You wanted to get me *home?*

MARY. Yes.

LETITIA. After raising heaven and earth to get me to go? Oh, she *is* out of her head.

HAL. No, she isn't. She's arrived at something important. Speak to us freely, Mary. We must be honest or it's all futile.

MAX. She needs a drink.

LYNN. Shut up, Max. What do you mean, Mary?

MARY. Sit down just a minute and I'll tell you. Ssh!

LETITIA. Oh don't push me. [*There is a general commotion.*]

MARY. Do be quiet. Don't wake anybody up—for heaven's sake. I suddenly knew I'd been all wrong —that the only thing to do was to get you back.

LETITIA. Do you mean it was all a joke?

LYNN. Ssh!

LETITIA. Did you never intend to—

MARY. No, no—no! Listen! Sit down, all of you —please.

LETITIA. Nobody wants to sit down.

HAL [*Sitting on the floor near Mary*] Yes, we do. Yes, we do. Don't be so emotional, Letitia. You have no mental poise at all.

LETITIA. No, and I don't want any. I'm sick of trying to act like a highbrow. I'm not one. I'm a human being.

HAL. Well, you might control your human feelings long enough to see what Mary's mental attitude is now. This reaction is very important.

MAX [*Lying on the floor in front of the others*] What the devil's it all about, anyway?

LYNN. Well, listen—listen, and you may find out.

LETITIA. We listened enough while you were working us up to *do* it, Mary. I don't want to listen while you *un*work us again.

MAX. Come on, sweetie. Sit down. Don't be peevish!

LETITIA. I think it's just too awful to come home in this perfectly flat way. [*Sitting with a flop*]

HAL. Wait, Lettie, till you find out how it is. This may be the beginning of something greater. I'm sure it is, Mary.

MAX. Stop chewing the rag Lettie.

LYNN. Oh for heaven's sake, be quiet. Go on, Mary.

LETITIA. Yes, do. We're all sitting at your feet as usual—waiting for you to tell us why you changed your mind.

MARY. I *didn't* change my mind. It was something much bigger than that.

MAX. Must have been *colossal* to make you turn turtle like this. [*They are all sitting on the floor in a circle about Mary. Each has lighted a cigarette.*]

MARY. The whole world and life and what it means suddenly flashed before me, and—

LETITIA. I thought that flashed before you long ago. I thought that was why we—

LYNN. Sh!

HAL. Wait, Lettie, wait.

MARY. I knew that we were wrong. That we were destroying something—hurting something.

LYNN. You bet we were! I'm darned thankful we're back. We're well out of a nasty mess, let me tell you.

MARY. Oh, *you* don't understand, Lynn. It isn't that at all. I mean that we were absolutely right in what we believed but we've got to be big enough not to hurt other people with it.

HAL. Oh, Mary that is so weak.

MARY. I never *wanted* to do anything so much in my life, but I just suddenly saw it the way Mother and Father would—and knew how it would seem to them.

MAX. You knew that in the first place, didn't you?

MARY. No—not actually—in the real way. None of us thought of it from their side.

HAL. Oh Mary, their side doesn't count. We know we're thinking way beyond the general level of thought and if we don't act on it we're not advancing. [*He hits Letitia's nose with a gesture.*]

LETITIA. Oh, Hal, my nose! [*There is general noise and confusion. Mary hushes them.*]

LYNN. I don't see any use advancing so far that everybody thinks you're a *lunatic.*

MARY. But because we *do* see further than other people—we must be a—magnanimous. They can't help it—you know—these deep prejudices, and after all—they *are* our parents.

HAL. Personally, I think parents are much overrated—and given entirely too much importance in the general scheme. Though I believe if my father had lived he would have been a great man.

LYNN. I suppose *you're* very much like him.

HAL. They say so. [*The others laugh.*] We're the next generation and the *next generation must go on.* We know that marriage *as is*—is a failure—a gigantic human failure—and we also know that it's getting worse.

MAX. You don't have to do much profound thinking to know that. Look at our own crowd. Every damned one of 'em divorced or ought to be. What's the use of being married at all?

LETITIA. Yes—love—yes—but we've said all that long ago and often. The discussion in hand at the moment is—was it a mistake for Mary to bring us back or not?

MARY. The point is—we have no right to make our parents suffer.

LETITIA. Suffer! Mother does anything *she* pleases—regardless of me. She's been married twice now and it isn't at all impossible that she will be again. She won't hesitate to rip things up—in spite of the

fact that I've just got used to calling this one Father, and just got so—I sort of can stand him. I don't see what I owe to them—and anyway, I don't think they'd suffer a darned bit no matter what became of me.

HAL. My mother is entirely sympathetic with our idea—of course. She knows Father would have left her sometime without a moment's notice, if he had lived. He wouldn't have vulgarized it with a quarrel or a divorce. *He* was *way* in advance of his time.

MAX. My father and mother are so old school—it would do them good to get a shock. If I want to try out Lettie in a *new* way—it's none of their business.

LETITIA. Try *me* out? I'm trying *you* out. Don't forget that, my lamb.

MAX [*Kissing her hand*] Excuse me darling.

HAL. If we never did anything except what our parents want us to do the world wouldn't move much.

MARY. Yes, but we've got to begin all over again and *make* them understand, and *tell* them what we're going to do. It was the sneaking away I couldn't stand.

LETITIA [*Getting up*] You certainly have put me in a sweet hole. I wrote a note and stuck it on Mother's pin cushion. I'm going to feel clever when they find me in bed in the morning in the same old way.

MARY. Oh Lettie, I *am* so sorry.

LETITIA. Oh don't mind me. Come on, Max. I might as well marry you *first*. Why not? You've got more money than anybody I know. [*Going up toward the window dragging her coat after her*]

MARY. Oh Tish, don't give up like that. We aren't through yet—we're just beginning.

LETITIA. I'm afraid you'll have a hard time inflating me again, Mary. I feel as though I had started off on wings and come back in a wheelbarrow. Are you coming or staying, Max?

MAX. You bet I'm coming. [*He hurries to the window*] So long! This is all right you know. Good luck, fellers—I've got *my* girl. [*He goes after Letitia.*]

LYNN. Of course it's all right. It's turned out the best thing in the world. And you were a brick—a brick, Mary, to do it.

MARY. It isn't all right. I've made it worse than ever—and nobody really understands what I meant at all.

LYNN. *I* do.

HAL. Have I ever misunderstood you, Mary? But I do think you were weak, dear girl. I do think you let sentiment—pure sentiment run away with you—after you've been so strong and done such good—*individual* thinking.

LYNN. Oh, cool off and let's get down to solid rock.

HAL. Oh yes, solid rock! That's what we're all chained to. I don't expect you to feel this as I do, Lynn. You couldn't.

LYNN. I *hope* not.

HAL. I'm not going to pretend that I'm not disappointed in you, Mary. But this isn't the end. You *will* do it yet—and in a still wider, fuller way. Anybody who's got the idealism you have, can't go back to the sordid conventional old rut.

LYNN. Start the car, old man, I'll be right out.

HAL. Thanks. I'll walk home.

MARY. Hal—you're not angry with me?

HAL. No—not angry, but hurt and horribly—*horribly* disappointed. You were thinking with distinction—and now you've gone back to the ordinary level of the average girl. Of course I'm disappointed. [*He goes out.*]

LYNN. It's turned out the best thing in the world. I love you more than ever, Mary. And you love me—don't you, dear?

MARY. Don't ask me now—please. I'm just beginning to find out something.

LYNN. You needn't expect me to believe for a minute that you hauled us off on this wild goose chase and then hauled us back again, because you got afraid of public opinion, and hurting people—and that stuff.

MARY. You don't—

LYNN. You say you had a sudden flash—well, it must have flashed on you which *one of us* you wanted to marry, and God knows it couldn't have been Hal—I give you credit for that—so, in all modesty, it must have been me.

MARY. I can't talk about it now. I want to think. The thing that brought me back is more important than *that* just now.

LYNN. Just what *did* bring you back? Tell me.

MARY. I will try to make you understand—sometime.

LYNN. I'll stop on my way downtown in the morning.

MARY. Then hurry. I want to lock the window.

LYNN. Well tell me this. Even if you haven't

found out yet, you want *me*—aren't you *dead sure* you don't want Hal?

MARY. Please go.

LYNN. But I want *you* and I want you harder than ever. Talk about going up into the stars! I went up and I'm still there and I'm going to stay. When you sat there close to me—making me go faster—when your hair blew in my face—I didn't care whether we smashed into eternity or not. We were together—alone.

MARY. We weren't. Hal was there.

LYNN. Same thing. You weren't the only one who got a flash of what it all means. It was only you and me and space—that was *life*, all right—and I'm going to keep on living it—*up there*—in the stars.

MARY. But we can't. It's too high.

LYNN. Not with *you*.

MARY. We had to come down.

LYNN. Well, what of it! When I think what you went out to find—and that you even let me go with you to try to find it—I—my head swims. I can't say it, Mary—but I *know* what you want—because I've found it. I couldn't wish anything more wonderful for you than for you to love someone the way I love you.

MARY. Oh Lynn! I wanted to go on with you forever. I wanted to push Hal out of the way and go on and on—and never stop—with *you*.

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. I wanted to get inside your coat—close to you—away from everything else in the world.

LYNN. And that's right where you're going to stay.

MARY. And then I got afraid—of myself—of you —of everything.

LYNN. Dear!

MARY. And then I wanted to come home—and now I don't know what I want. We've lost that wild sweet something. It's gone and I'm afraid it will never come back.

LYNN. You wanted to come home because you knew that you loved me. All that wild stuff's over. We don't need it. I love you, and I'm coming over the first thing in the morning, to tell your father and mother.

MARY. Oh—I s'pose you might as well. There's nothing else to do.

LYNN. What's the matter dear? Aren't you happy?

MARY. I was—out there.

LYNN. And you will be here. We've got the star dust and we're going to hold on to it—tight.

MARY. Do you think we can?

LYNN. Certainly we can—nothing as great as this can get away from us.

MARY. We mustn't let it, Lynn—we mustn't let it. Go now—please. [*He holds her a moment—kisses her—and goes out quickly. Mary fastens the window—starts to the hall door and sees Bobby asleep on the couch.*] Bobby, what are you doing there? [*She goes to the couch and shakes him.*] Bobby! Wake up. I bet you're just pretending to be asleep. I'll bet you heard everything. Bobby—*get up!*

BOBBY. Un?

MARY. What are you doing down here this time of night?

BOBBY [*Half waking*] I came down to unlock the window for you—and I want to give you a tip.

MARY. What about?

BOBBY. They're on the war path. You've done it once too often. What the devil do you mean staying out so late? A girl can't get away with stuff like that —chasing 'round all night.

MARY. Oh a girl—a girl! What's the reason I can't come in when I please? [*Sitting on the couch beside Bobby.*]

BOBBY. Because you *can't*. Dad's foaming at the mouth. Gramma told him about your dope for goin' campin'.

MARY. She didn't!

BOBBY. She did.

MARY. If Grandma could only hold her tongue *once* in a while!

BOBBY. I wish she'd let me hold it for her once in a while. I'd pull it out.

MARY. What did Father say?

BOBBY. He's going to send you away.

MARY. What? Where?

BOBBY. Oh—just away. [*Waving his arm*] Anywhere out of this pernicious town with its pernicious influences.

MARY. Lordie, doesn't it make you tired?

BOBBY. You were a chump if you thought you could get away with that. You never would have had the nerve to do it anyway.

MARY. We *did* it. We were there—at the place where we were going to stay.

BOBBY. When?

MARY. Tonight. We went sixty miles an hour some of the time. It was marvelous.

BOBBY. You're a queer nut, Mary. What in "h" did you get yourself into that kind of a—

MARY. Because I'm *tired* of doing just what everybody else does because they think anything different is wrong. I came back for Mother and Father's sake—but if they're going to act up about it, I wish I'd *stayed.*

BOBBY. Well, gosh—you can't blame them much. Your rep won't be worth two cents if it gets out. Dad hit the ceiling so hard he hasn't come down yet. Honest, Mary, he *is* going to do something. Don't let 'em know you *did* go. He'll sizzle you. You'll have to dope up some reason why you stayed out all night.

MARY. I *won't.* Why should I? The way Mother and Father *make* you lie is sickening. Why can't they let me alone? I don't say anything to them about the things *they* do.

BOBBY. Wouldn't you *like* to, though?

MARY. *Wouldn't* I? Just to let go and tell 'em a few things.

BOBBY. I'd like to shoot a few at Dad—square in the eye—what I like about him and what I don't.

MARY. Exactly.

BOBBY. If I could just once let him know that I'm *on* to him I could listen to his favorite remarks about my character with more equanimity.

MARY. I know. *We're* always wrong. They *never* are.

BOBBY. And the worst of it is you can't tell 'em.

MARY. Tell? You might as well try to tell God He's wrong.

BOBBY. If Dad didn't take it as a matter of religion that I ought to give him the paper! If *once* in a while, he'd say "Here, Bob, you take it"—I'd be crazy about giving it to him.

MARY. Of course. And if I could only *talk* to Mother. I did try. I did try to make her see. She doesn't know at all what I want and what I think and feel. I know a great deal more about life and what's going on this minute than she does. They've never done anything thrilling or had any fun themselves and they don't expect anybody else to.

BOBBY [*With a chuckle*] Oh I don't know. They must have been pretty devilish—buggy-ridin' Sunday afternoons.

MARY. Yes—looking for wild flowers. Mother never had any beau but Father, I s'pose, and she just married him and settled down and there you are. Anything *I* do is wrong because *they* haven't done it. [*Giving Bobby a poke to make him move over and sitting closer to him*] Listen, Bobby. I came back for *them.* I wanted to do this thing more than I ever wanted anything in my life—but just as I was the happiest and the surest I heard Mother say—"I trust you—always—anywhere"—and she stayed right there with me—nearer than she's ever been before and I—well—I came back.

BOBBY. Darn good job you did too. I could have

told you before you started your idea was bunk.

MARY. Oh of course it all seems silly to you. You aren't old enough to know what it means.

BOBBY. Slush! I'm eighteen—you're only twenty.

MARY. Yes, but those two years make all the difference in the world.

BOBBY. Ho—o—Don't you fool yourself—I know a thing or two. Those fellows are big chumps if they were goin' off to let you size them up like that and take your choice.

MARY. Well—anyway—here I am—back—as Lettie says—in the same old flat way. You see—I began to think about Mother and Father somehow. They're narrow and old-fashioned, but they're *good.*

BOBBY. Yea—they're all right—even if they do scrap sometimes.

MARY. Sometimes I'm sort of worried about them.

BOBBY. I know. Sometimes it's rotten.

MARY. But home and the family and you and me are the most important things in the world to them. After all we're awfully lucky to have such parents. Lots of them are running around on the loose, you know.

BOBBY. You bet your sweet life they are!

MARY. And a really, truly home like ours *is* wonderful—and I just couldn't do anything to hurt it. They're good and they love us, and they *do* love each other. I guess I *will* just sneak upstairs and tell one more lie to keep them happy. Don't you ever really peep that I really *did* go. Don't—for their sakes, old man.

BOBBY. I'm with you. Go to it, Sis. [*She takes*

up her suitcase.] St! They're coming!—Beat it! [*Mary starts to the hall door.*] Look out! You can't do that.—You're caught. [*Mary drops the suitcase. Bobby turns out the light and rolls under the sofa. Mother comes in quickly from the hall—runs to the lower window and peers out. She wears a negligee—her hair disordered.*]

FATHER [*From the hall*] Are they there?

MOTHER. No.

FATHER [*Coming in—in bath robe and slippers*] I told you so. He's gone after her then. They're in cahoots. He knew all the time where she was.

MOTHER. I hope so.

FATHER. You do? You hope he lied to me steadily for hours?

MOTHER. Yes—if he knew where she is.

FATHER [*He paces about restlessly irritable with apprehension*] There you are. No wonder they lie.

MOTHER. They don't lie.

FATHER. They don't lie—don't they?

MOTHER. No, they don't.

FATHER. No they don't. They just go on deceiving you and getting away with it because you shut your eyes to it.

MOTHER. You wouldn't telephone any place again, would you?

FATHER. What good would that do? We've tried every place. Lettie's gone. Those good-for-nothing boys are gone. Of course that's what it means. She's bolted,—right under your nose.

MOTHER. I won't believe it. She *couldn't*. She wouldn't do it without telling me.

FATHER. Telling you? She *did* tell you.

MOTHER. She only said she was *thinking* about it. She was honest enough to tell me that—and I could have persuaded—

FATHER. Honest your foot! She's fooled you—deceived you. She does all the time.

MOTHER [*Coming away from the window*] Do you think Bobby *has* gone after her?

FATHER. He must have. He must have gone . . . to warn her that I know and that I'm going to punish her. I think he's gone to tell her that and bring her back.

MOTHER. Listen! I thought the 'phone was going to ring.

FATHER. I tell you I'm going to change things. I'm through. I won't be made a fool of by my own children. What's the matter with 'em? Where do they get it anyway? I sometimes think it's something in *you* they get their looseness from, Mary.

MOTHER. I expect it is.

FATHER [*His voice rising*] I don't believe you *try*. You're not firm enough. If you'd kept *at* it—day in and day out, since they were born—impressing the principles of—

MOTHER. Don't yell so! I'm not deaf. You'll raise the neighbors.

FATHER. I'll raise the roof. I'll raise heaven and earth. I won't *have* such children. What *do* you teach them—anyway?

MOTHER [*Going back to the window*] I don't teach them anything. What difference does it make? I want to *know where she is.*

FATHER. She's *gone.* That's what she is. She's disgraced us.

MOTHER. I don't believe it.

FATHER. No—you never face facts. That's what's put us where we are. She's *gone off just the way she told you she was going to.*

MOTHER. Try to get Lettie's house once more.

FATHER. No use getting that maid out of bed again. She's told us *fifteen times now* there's *nobody at home.* Of course that blatherskite of a Lettie—has chosen a time to go off when her mother and father *are* away—but yours did it right before your eyes.

MOTHER [*Going back to her chair again*] Don't keep on saying that. *Do* something.

FATHER. Why didn't *you* do something at the right time? Why in the name of heaven haven't you controlled her?

MOTHER. Because *I don't know how.*

FATHER. Why don't you know how? It's your job. Why can't you run your house and your children as well as I run my office? Good Lord, she's only a young girl. You're more than twice her age. Why can't you manage her?

MOTHER. You're more than *three times* Bobby's age. Why don't you manage him?

FATHER. I do.

MOTHER. No, you don't.

FATHER. Besides, he's a boy. He's got to have experience. It wouldn't hurt him to go off on a spurt like this.

MOTHER. It would. It would. I couldn't bear it.

FATHER. You undermine everything I say to him

anyway—with your softness. *I* don't know what's the matter. It's not *my* fault. What in the name of heaven *is* the matter? Why have we *got* such rotten children?

[*He sinks into a chair—putting his head in his hands*]

MOTHER [*After a pause*] We don't know what kind of children we have.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We don't know them. We don't know how to take care of them. We don't come any place near it.

FATHER. Speak for yourself. Don't blame *me* because *you've failed.*

MOTHER. Of course *you* haven't—in *any* way.

FATHER. No—I don't think I have.

MOTHER. You're always *right* about *everything.*

FATHER. Well, what am I wrong about *now*? Haven't I told you from the beginning all the things you've let her do would—

MOTHER. Yes—yes—yes—you have!

FATHER. It's because you haven't done what I wanted that—

MOTHER. You're only thinking about what *you* want—and not about what's right for them at all.

FATHER. Well, is this right? This and everything that's led up to it?

MOTHER. No—but you wouldn't have made it any better by being hard and pig-headed.

FATHER [*Getting up*] Have you made it any better by being so weak and sloppy you let this happen?

MOTHER. She didn't mean any *harm.*

[*Beginning to cry with quiet heartbroken tears*]

FATHER. Oh no—no harm—just disgraced us. That's all.

MOTHER. Poor child! She was trying to find the unfindable thing—a perfect love. I went through it myself floundering around in the dark—trying to choose.

FATHER. I think you did pretty well for yourself—choosing.

MOTHER. Oh yes—it was wise choosing—

FATHER. You regret it—do you?

MOTHER. Don't you?

FATHER. If I do, I've got the decency not to say so.

MOTHER. If you could have seen what we'd be like in twenty-five years—would you have chosen *me*?

FATHER. If you feel that way about it—whose fault is it?

MOTHER. Or even *ten*. Did we have ten years that were worth *anything*?

FATHER. Are you blaming *me*?

MOTHER. At the end of *five* we were a failure—jogging along—letting out the worst side of ourselves for the other to live with.

FATHER. You're saying a lot of wild things. You haven't had one of these spells for years.

MOTHER. No—because I've just about given up *trying* to tell the truth to you about *anything*.

FATHER. That's so all right. You certainly are not any too keen about telling the *truth*.

MOTHER. Because you can't stand it. Your nature can't stand the truth.

FATHER. Oh don't excuse your lies and deceit and weakness by *my nature.*

MOTHER. Don't think I wouldn't be glad to be honest—to honestly be *myself.* You think I'm weak. Well, you couldn't *stand* my strength.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We *can't* speak the truth to each other. We haven't anything to speak it with.

FATHER. I'm flabbergasted at you. You seem to have lost what sense you did have. You disappoint me terribly.

MOTHER [*With a sudden outburst as her suffering gets beyond her control*] Of course I do. Don't you think you disappoint *me?*

FATHER. You haven't come along the way I thought you were going to. I can't *count* on you. You aren't *there.* Sometimes I think you aren't the woman I married at all.

MOTHER. And sometimes I think you're a man I *couldn't* have married. Sometimes I loathe everything you think and say and do. When you grind out that old stuff I could *shriek.* I can't breathe in the same room with you. The very sound of your voice drives me insane. When you tell me how right you are—I could strike you.

FATHER. Mary!

MOTHER. Oh!

[*She screams as she suddenly sees the suitcase*]

FATHER. My God—what's the matter?

MOTHER. Her suitcase! That wasn't here when I was in this room before. She *is* here. Mary—my darling—where are you?

[*She rushes out of the room. Father goes after her. After a pause Mary comes slowly from behind the curtain—stricken white and dumbfounded*]

MARY. Bobby! They hate each other.

BOBBY. Un.

MARY. How can they ever speak to each other again!

BOBBY. D'know.

MARY. I didn't know it was like this. And you can tell it's been going on—sort of smothered.

BOBBY. It sure has busted out now.

MARY. It makes me—all gone—inside.

BOBBY. Nothing to hang on to.

MARY. Father and Mother! I wish I hadn't come back.

BOBBY. I'd like to light out myself.

MARY. *Our* father and mother! I can't believe it!

BOBBY [*Going close to Mary*] We can't let 'em know we know.

MARY. How can we help it?

BOBBY. I guess plenty of parents fight.

MARY. But *ours*! I always thought they were so *good*! Oh Bobby!

[*She drops her head on his shoulder and is shaken with sobs*]

MOTHER [*Calling from the hall*] Mary—Mary—where are you? [*Rushing back into the room*] Oh my dearest—where were you? Where have you been? What have you been doing?

FATHER. [*Having come in after Mother*] Now young lady! This is the last time! Where have you been? What have you been doing?

MARY. Nothing wrong.

MOTHER. How *could* you? Do you know what time it is?

FATHER. It's morning. That's what time it is—and you've been out all night. This is the last time you're going to do a thing like this. And I know your *new* idea—what you were planning to do.

MOTHER. Robert—wait.

FATHER. I almost thought you'd done it tonight. If you're reckless enough to have wanted to do it at all—I almost thought maybe you'd started off tonight.

MARY. I did.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. Oh no—Mary—you didn't. You didn't do that.

FATHER. You what?

MARY. I—went—tonight—all of us, to the place we were going to stay.

MOTHER. Mary—

MARY. And then we came back.

MOTHER. You don't mean you went to *stay?* You didn't expect to do that?

MARY. Yes I did.

FATHER. I'm not surprised. This is the *end.* You've gone too far. I'm going to send you away.

MOTHER. Oh Robert—no you're not. Wait!

FATHER. Why should I wait? I've waited too long. I'm going to send you where you'll live a decent normal life till you come to your senses. The thing you planned to do is a brazen outrage.

MOTHER. She didn't do it. She came home.

FATHER. Much *home* means to her! You've

abused it all—everything your Mother and I have taught you to respect and hold sacred—thrown it away. Why you came back at all I don't see.

MARY. I came back for a very silly reason.

FATHER. I'll bet you did—nothing with any good in it.

MARY. No—not a bit.

MOTHER. My dearest—don't say that. You came back because you love us.

MARY. [*Breaking a little but controlling herself quickly*] Yes—I did, Mother.

MOTHER. Because you were sorry and didn't want to hurt us.

FATHER. Hurt us! You've wounded us so we'll never get over it. You've destroyed everything your Mother and I have held up to you as right—all our standards—the sanctity of the home.

MARY. Oh *rot*, Father.

MOTHER. Mary! Stop it! You're out of your senses.

MARY. I came home for that and found it was a joke.

FATHER. What do you mean?

MARY. We heard you—Bobby and I. We were here in this room.

FATHER. Heard us what?

MARY. Heard you say things to each other that makes everything you're talking about now *disgusting*.

MOTHER. Oh, my child!

FATHER. You heard us discussing *you* and what you've done. You heard us say how pained we are.

MARY. We heard you *fight.*

MOTHER. Mary—don't—don't! You don't understand, dear child. Your Father and I were only excited. I honor and respect your father above everything on earth.

FATHER. Your Mother and I have had a lifetime of devotion—with the highest ideals of married life. We didn't think we'd live to see our own children desecrate all that we've lived for.

MARY. Oh don't! We heard. We know. You told each other the *truth.* What's the good of trying to plaster it over for us?

FATHER. There's nothing left. This is the result of the wild life you've been leading.

BOBBY. Why do you keep going on about *her?* It's you two that have smashed everything up.

FATHER. Stop! She's disgraced us.

BOBBY. She's not the one that's done the disgracin'.

MARY. I don't see how Bobby and I can ever hold up our heads again.

MOTHER. Don't child—don't.

MARY. What's the use of anything when everything we ever thought and believed about *you* isn't true?

BOBBY. We *know we're rotten*—plenty of times—but we always thought you were—

MARY. We always thought you were good.

FATHER. How *dare* you? Is nothing sacred to you?

MARY. A lot of things used to be. We always thought there was something between you and Mother, sort of holy—and different—that most people didn't

have at all. How do you s'pose we feel when we know that it isn't so? I don't see that it makes much difference what *we* do—anyway—when everything's all wrong with *you.*

[*She goes swiftly out of the room as her sobs begin to come. Father turns away to the window. Mother sits helpless and dazed. Bobby lowers his head—ashamed to look at either one of them as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

TIME: *Three hours later.*

The dining room.

The same curtains are used for the walls—with the same doors and windows placed in a different arrangement. The table is set for breakfast.

Father sits at the Right, holding the newspaper so that it completely hides him from Mother who sits opposite, trying to drink her coffee, and making a pretense of reading a few letters.

MOTHER. [*Forcing herself to speak*] We must make them know it was never—quite so bad before.

FATHER. Oh, I guess they've come to their senses by this time.

MOTHER. No matter *how* you feel towards me, make them think—

FATHER. I don't know that it makes much difference what they think.

MOTHER. It's the only thing that *does* make much difference.

FATHER. The point is, what are we going to do with her. And I've made up my mind.

MOTHER. To what? What are you going to do? [*A pause*] You wouldn't do anything without telling me. You—

[*Nora enters from the pantry with a small platter*

of scrambled eggs. She puts the platter on the serving table.]

FATHER. Thank you, Nora.

[*Nora looks from one to the other—scenting something wrong—removes the fruit plates and serves the eggs. Mr. Hollister takes some, Mrs. Hollister refuses, Nora goes out.*]

MOTHER. You wouldn't do anything without telling me?

FATHER. What good will it do to tell you?

MOTHER. But you can't—

FATHER. *You* didn't tell *me.* And it's because you didn't that this whole thing has come about. You've shown you haven't the strength and decision to compete with your children. There's nothing left but for me to take hold and—

MOTHER. Be careful.

[*Granny enters from the hall cheerful and chipper. She wears an agreeable little lavender frock and a pink fluffy shoulder shawl*]

GRANNY. Good morning.

MOTHER. Good morning, Mother.

GRANNY. I said good morning, Robert.

FATHER. [*From behind the paper*] Oh—good morning.

GRANNY. [*Opening her napkin with cheerful fussiness*] The paper must be even more entertaining than usual. Didn't I get any letters, Mary?

MOTHER. No—nothing.

GRANNY. Who are yours from?

MOTHER. Oh nobody in particular.

GRANNY. They must be from *somebody.* Pass me

the sugar, Robert, please. Isn't there anything you want me to read, Mary?

MOTHER. Oh—here's one from Cousin Maria.

GRANNY. Funny she didn't write it to me. She owes me one. Sugar—sugar, Robert. [*Poking Robert's arm, then opening the letter*] I don't see why Maria *will* use this paper. I've told her twice I don't like it. [*Robert passes the sugar to Granny*] Thank you, Robert. [*Patting his hand and smiling at him in her most irresistible way*] Feel a little grumpy this morning? Didn't sleep well, I expect. Mary, are you going to give me any coffee or not? Is your coffee all right, Robert? Nobody's paying any attention to you. I believe in petting a man a little in the morning till he gets the creaks out, and sort of warmed up. I'm always sorry for a man when he has to leave his comfortable home and start off for the day. Goodness! Maria's writing gets worse and worse. I can't read a word she says. Read it to me, Mary.

MOTHER. I will after breakfast, Mother.

GRANNY. You aren't eating a thing. At least you do come down to the table. I'm glad you're not like the lazy women who lie in bed and have their *own* breakfasts and let their husbands come down to the table. I think breakfast is the nicest meal of the day and the time people ought to be the cheeriest. Where are the children? You certainly do let them lag behind, Mary.

MOTHER. They were up late. I'm letting them sleep.

GRANNY. It wouldn't hurt them to come and see

their father. I know a man likes to see his family 'round him before he starts off for the day. Does Maria say anything about coming?

MOTHER. Um—sort of a hint.

GRANNY. Well, just don't you take it. I love Maria dearly, but I can't stand her in the same house. There's nothing she hasn't got her nose in— [*Nora enters*] just boss, boss, boss. Maria's got money. Let her stay at home and spend it. Don't you say so, Robert? Do put down that old paper, Robbie, and eat your breakfast. What's the news?

FATHER. Oh—nothing.

GRANNY. I never saw a man in my life who found any news in the paper after having his head stuck in it for a week. [*Nora serves the eggs to Granny.*] Oh! Scrambled eggs again! I wonder if she stirred cream in these? Did you tell Lizzie what I said, Nora?

NORA. Yes m'am.

GRANNY. What did she say?

NORA. Well—

GRANNY. Lizzie's a mule. It's the only way they're fit to eat. [*Nora goes out*] See how tough these are? [*She takes a bite of egg complacently and looks from Mother to Father.*] What *is* the matter? What's the matter, Mary?

MOTHER. Why nothing, Mother.

GRANNY. You two had a tiff? What if you have? This is another day. You have to begin all over again.

FATHER. It looks like rain.

GRANNY. Does it?

[*A pause*]

FATHER. We need rain. The country needs it badly.

GRANNY. Yes, I s'pose it does.

FATHER [*After another pause*] It's been the driest spell we've had for some time.

GRANNY. [*With a chuckle*] Robert's doing pretty well, Mary. You might say *something.*

MOTHER. I have a headache, Mother. I can't talk.

[*Nora enters, with more eggs and toast*]

GRANNY. If I'd stopped talking to your father every time I had a headache many a thing would have happened that didn't. I hope you two haven't quarreled over Mary. You have to stand *together* to control her. That's the only way you'll ever—

[*Mary comes in from the hall—solemnly followed by Bobby*]

MOTHER. Good morning, dear. Good morning, Bobby.

BOBBY AND MARY. Good morning.

GRANNY. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. [*They seat themselves*] Aren't you going to kiss me good morning?

MARY. Do you want me to?

GRANNY. No—I don't especially want you to—but I think you ought to.

MARY. I don't see why.

GRANNY. I'm not so anxious to be kissed, young lady—but I believe in keeping up appearances.

MARY. I don't.

GRANNY. Um—you'll get over that—the longer you live.

MOTHER. Eat your breakfast, dear.

[*As Nora serves the eggs again*]

MARY. No thank you, Nora.

MOTHER. Oh—

MARY. No—just some coffee, Mother.

FATHER. No thank you, Nora.

[*Bobby falls upon his breakfast eagerly. Mother pours two cups of coffee. Nora serves the coffee to Mary and Bobby, and goes out.*]

GRANNY. You're all awfully silly. I don't know why you can't go on eating, just because there was a little—*discussion* last night. You needn't be nifty at me, Missy, because I told your father. I did it for your own good.

MARY. Oh, that's a very small thing, Granny. Forget it.

GRANNY. Then what *is* the matter? Why can't you start off the day like a happy family ought to?

MARY. Because we're not a happy family.

MOTHER. Mary—

GRANNY. Then why don't somebody tell me what's the matter?

MARY. I should think you'd know.

FATHER. That will do. We won't discuss it now. But I've come to a decision.

MARY. About you and Mother?

FATHER. About you. I'm going to send you where you will learn the important things of life and learn to conform to the opinions of those who know.

MARY. Where am I to learn that?

FATHER. At a school I know of—a very fine one.

MARY. And are you and Mother going on in the same way?

FATHER. What do you mean?

MARY. I'm perfectly willing to go away to school or any old place if it will help. Bobby and I talked it all over. If you and Mother want a divorce, we'll see you through.

GRANNY. She's out of her senses.

FATHER. Don't put me and your Mother in the same class with the rotten set you've been running with. We don't tear up the ties of a lifetime just because we've had—a—hard places—sometimes.

MARY. Do you mean you've patched it up? We won't *let* you.

FATHER. *Stop* I say.

MARY. Mother, do you prefer to stick together and hate each other?

MOTHER. You have a wrong impression. We were only wrought up over— [*Bobby starts to leave the table.*]

MARY. Bobby, for heaven's sake, speak up. Tell them what *you* think.

FATHER [*Shouting at Bobby*] Are you a part of this rubbish?

BOBBY. I know how you feel, Dad. I used to feel that way about it myself. But I changed my mind last night—after I saw how things are. We'll buck up and do anything—so long as it's got to be. Don't mind us.

FATHER. This is *insufferable.*

MARY. Go on, Bobby.

GRANNY. I can't stand it!

BOBBY. There's nothin' the matter with a divorce

—it's the havin' to have it that's rotten—and when you do—why you just *got*-a. So let's get at it and get done with it.

FATHER. You leave the room. Go upstairs.

[*To Mary*] Tonight I'll try to make you see straight. I can't say anything more now.

MOTHER. [*Shaking her head at Nora who starts in from the pantry*] No—Nora. Don't come in at all. [*Nora goes out.*]

MARY. I won't go away a step—to school or any place else—till you and Mother are settled.

FATHER. You'll do as I say.

MARY. And leave Mother wretched like this?

FATHER. Your mother is *not* wretched.

MARY. Yes, she is, and so are you, Father.

FATHER. I'm not.

MARY. Mother, do you want to go on living with Father or *not?* [*Mother bursts into tears.*]

FATHER. You've made her hysterical. She can't speak.

GRANNY. Well, *I* can! Hold up your head, Mary, and tell us you're a happy woman.

[*To Mary the Third*] You ought to thank your lucky stars your father and mother get along as well as they do. Life's not all skittles and beer, let me tell you—and you ought to be put to bed on bread and water till you get over this romantic notion of wanting to be *happy* every minute.

MOTHER. You don't understand, you children. Your father and I are sorry we quarreled last night, but you're making too much of it entirely. Stop it. It's over and ended.

MARY. You're crawling out of it, Mother. Now's your chance. We all *know*. You can't go back to the same old thing, because we *do* know.

FATHER. If reason won't control you something else will. You've made it impossible for us to let you stay at home. You've outraged everything that goes to make a home.

MARY. That's what *we* think *you've* done.

BOBBY. There isn't any home when you and Mother are like this.

FATHER. Do you set yourselves up against us?

MARY. Say something, Bobby.

BOBBY. What more is there to say? We've told you we don't want you to go on tryin' to keep up the bluff for *our sakes*. And you surely don't want to for yourselves. So what is there to it but to get together and quit? We're only tellin' you that we want you and Mother to be happy, and go to it. [*He goes out of the room.*]

FATHER. If it comes to defiance—you'll both go away.

MARY. Very well. We'll meet you half way. We'll go if you and Mother get a divorce.

FATHER. I'll settle you tonight. [*He goes out*]

MARY. Oh Mother, don't cry.

GRANNY. What do you expect her to do? It's the awfullest thing I ever heard of any child doing to any parent—*ever*—*any*where.

MARY. Oh Lord, I don't see anything to cry about. Let's get some action.

MOTHER. I think the best thing to do *is* for you to go away for a while, dear. Till we get over this.

MARY. Mother—do you actually mean you *want* to go on living with Father?

GRANNY. Listen to her! Who *else* would she live with?

MARY. Granny, will you keep out of this—*please?* I'm trying to help Mother.

MOTHER. Oh, don't you two quarrel. I can't stand any more.

GRANNY. We're not quarreling. Come here, honey—come here. [*Drawing a chair out from the table and sitting*]

Now listen, dearie. I know more in a minute about men than you and your mother put together. It won't be necessary for you or anybody else to go away—or upset our peace and comfort, if you'll just use your wits. A little tact and wheedling goes further with a man than all the storming in the world. You can get anything on earth out of your father if you'll just manage him. Let him *think* you're giving up to him, and you'll get your own way every time.

MARY. I think that's perfectly disgusting, Granny.

GRANNY. Now—now—don't be saucy. I'm trying to help you.

MARY. I don't need to be helped. It's Mother.

GRANNY. Well, the only way you can help her is to calm your father down. Rub him the right way till all this blows over.

MARY. Blows *over?* If you don't know how it is you ought to. They don't *love* each other. Bobby and I found it out last night, and we can't stand this twaddle and mush about home and the family when we

know Mother and Father ought not to even be in the same house. Is that the truth, Mother—or isn't it?

GRANNY. It's new-fangled nonsense. Modern selfishness. That's what it is. A man and woman have no right to expect to be happy *all* the time—every minute—day and night. You *have* to have a good fight now and then to clear the air. Your grandfather and I had plenty. You women now-a-days don't know how to manage men. That's what's the matter with you. Of course they get the best of you because you're trying to make 'em think you know as much as they do, and they won't *stand* it. You're such simpletons. You oughtn't to let 'em *ever* see how smart you are. Why I had my way about everything on earth. The madder your grandfather got the more I cried and the softer I was. I just twisted him round my finger—like that. And he thought I was right under his thumb.

MARY. Oh Granny—how can you! Mother isn't Father's mistress you know.

GRANNY [*Putting her hands over her face*] Oh! I never used that word in my life!

MARY. It's a perfectly good word. Mother and Father undertook the greatest relationship in the world and it hasn't been a success—so the only thing for them to do is to start another kind of life entirely. Isn't that so, Mother?

GRANNY. No, it's not! What would become of the rest of us?

MARY. *Us?* What have we got to do with it? It's their own inner closest life. It's not *right* for

them to live together. It's not decent. It's absolutely *immoral.*

GRANNY. I won't listen to such talk! It's Godless and heathenish! [*Going to Mother.*] Mary, you come upstairs and I'll help you. I can help you to bear anything you've got to bear with Christian fortitude as a good and noble wife should. I never dreamed you were silly enough to *let* yourself be unhappy. Heaven knows, you've got enough to be happy with—and if you're as clever as you ought to be you'll take the bit in your own teeth and he'll come trotting right along. There ain't a man on earth as smart as a woman if she just uses what God gave her—and there's no young chit can teach *me* any tricks! [*She goes out with her head well up, closing the door.*]

MARY. Now Mother—let's decide what to do.

MOTHER. Mary, you *must* stop this. You're making a tragedy out of just a little hard place that your father and I have to get over in our own way.

MARY. *Was* there someone else you ought to have married—or just the ideal man of your dreams?

MOTHER. Oh, we always like to think it might have been different with someone else—when we fail. I *have* failed—utterly.

MARY [*Kneeling quickly by her Mother and throwing her arms about her*] I adore you Mother. I didn't know till last night how much I loved you. I'm lots older than you are. Really I am. You're just a little girl and I'm going to take care of you.

MOTHER. I wish I were.

MARY. But still I *am* awfully sorry for Father. You do get on his nerves. He's bored. Father's bored

to death with you, Mother. You're disappointed and disillusioned in him—but I do think it's more your fault than his.

MOTHER. Oh—Mary— Why?

MARY. Women will have to change marriage—men never will. At least you've come a long way ahead of Granny. Her marriage was on a very *low plane*, of course. You haven't stood up to Father and looked into his eyes—levelly—without conditions and silly compromise because he's a man and you're a woman.

MOTHER. Go on.

MARY. The interesting side of you—as a *person*—you haven't given to Father at all. He said last night 'You don't come through. You aren't there.' He *is* there—in his way. There's *his* side too.

MOTHER. Oh-h—don't think I don't know that.

MARY. But you *are* going to stand up now and keep a stiff lip and come through with *this*.

MOTHER. I don't see anything but blankness before me. And there's Mother. She has to have a home.

MARY [*Looking deeply at her mother*] You mean you haven't any *money* without Father? That you and Granny are dependent on him? [*Mother nods.*] All that is so horrible . . . so disreputable!

MOTHER. *Mary!*

MARY. It *is!* It's *buying* things with *you*. Don't let it go on, Mother. We'll fix it some way. I'll help you.

MOTHER. I'm not young. I can't go out and make my own living.

MARY. But you *ought* to be able to. That's the point to the whole business. I shall *have* my own money. I'll *make it*. I shall live with a man because I love him and only as long as I love him. I shall be able to take care of myself *and* my children if necessary. Anything else gives the man a horrible advantage, of course. It makes the woman a kept woman.

MOTHER. Oh you—

MARY. Why it *does*, Mother. The biggest, fairest, most chivalrous man on earth can't feel the same towards a woman who lives with him only because she has to be taken care of—as he does to one who lives with him because she loves him. Unless it's love and only love—

FATHER [*Coming back into the room*] I want to speak to your mother. [*After a slight pause Mary goes out.*]

FATHER. The boy's hard hit. He's taken this thing terribly seriously. We've got to do something about it.

MOTHER. And the girl?

FATHER. Oh— She's excited—but *he* is actually suffering. As you say we've got to make them see they're mistaken. . . .

MOTHER. But *are* they?

FATHER. Then you meant everything you said to me last night?

MOTHER. And you meant everything you said to me.

FATHER. We were all stirred up.

MOTHER. Yes—enough to speak the truth.

FATHER. Well—what are you going to do? Let them go on—thinking what they think?

MOTHER. They've made their own solution.

FATHER. You mean . . . [*She nods.*]

You don't think for a second we . . . [*A pause.*]

We haven't done anything people get—divorces for, Mary. [*His voice growing a little hoarse.*]

MOTHER. We've done the worst of all things.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. We haven't made it a success—and it *might* have been.

FATHER. Oh—we've been careless. We need more self-control I s'pose.

MOTHER. Self-control is a poor substitute for love.

FATHER. It's impossible to think of you and me—not together. It used to be all right. We've got to go back and begin all over again.

MOTHER. Go back to what?

FATHER. See here, Mary—some of the nonsense that child spouted has got hold of you. Don't let any of her silly . . .

MOTHER. She isn't silly. She's brutal because she's so young—but she's honest and—

FATHER. She's the product of this damnable modern loose-thinking.

MOTHER. And she's thinking nearer the truth than *we* ever did. She's got something dangerous and ridiculous in *one* hand and something big and real in the other.

FATHER. Oh, you can't take her seriously?

MOTHER. You say we must go back. Go back to

what? Our accidental love affair—when we didn't know each other at all? We *do* know each other now. How can we go on after this? *I* can't.

FATHER. What about me? I've got something to say about this—too—you know. I won't have my home broken up. Good God, Mary! Nothing means anything to me but you and the children! I won't have—

LYNN [*Coming in from the veranda quickly*] Good morning. Good morning, Mrs. Hollister. I'm glad you haven't gone yet, Mr. Hollister. I want to say to you both that I've come back to my senses good and hard. Mary's up in the clouds about the whole business but I've come down with a thud and know where my feet are. I know the good old way is the *only* way—like you two did it. *You* didn't need any experiments to make you know you loved each other for good and all, did you? You *knew* you'd stick to the end, and be crazy about each other forever—didn't you? And you've proved it. And that's what got Mary, you know. She sort of seemed to realize for the first time what marriage means, and she came back for your sakes. [*Mother and Father turn away*] Honest, I'm not stringin' you. I know you want to kick me, Mr. Hollister, but I've come to you in the good old way to say I'd like to marry your daughter and ask your *consent*. I *know* I can make her happy—and I *know* we were meant for each other, and I know we'll make a go of it the same way you have, and I hope you'll back me up and help me to get her.

[*He forces Mr. Hollister to give him his hand and shakes it vigorously and confidently*]

FATHER [*To Mother—trying to get his hand away while Lynn shakes it*] Bring Mary down here and let's get at this thing. [*Mother goes out closing the door*] Has she promised to marry you?

LYNN. Yes. Don't you think I'd make her a good husband, Mr. Hollister?

FATHER. How do I know what kind of a husband you'd make?

LYNN. But with your experience, don't you think if a girl marries a solid practical man who can take care of her—

FATHER. I don't think that has anything to do with the case.

LYNN. But if we're—

HAL. [*Coming in from the veranda*] Good morning, Mr. Hollister. Hello, Lynn.

LYNN. Hello.

HAL. I was going in to your office this morning, Mr. Hollister, to see you.

FATHER. *Indeed!*

HAL. I want you to know that I'm sorry we didn't go through with it last night.

FATHER. Ah!

HAL. Because it *looks* like a failure, doesn't change *me* in the least.

FATHER. That's important.

HAL. I *know* we were right.

LYNN. Oh, cool off, Hal. It's all over now and Mr. Hollister doesn't care anything about what *we* think.

HAL. Excuse me—it *isn't* all over. And what I think is more important than ever. I want you to know, Mr. Hollister, that I love your daughter too

much to marry her in the old blind accidental lottery that *your* marriage was.

FATHER. What?

HAL. It *was* a lottery, wasn't it? Just good luck that it turned out as it has? It might have gone the other way for anything you really know about each other, mightn't it? You've just had the luck of one in a thousand that you've loved each other devotedly and continuously all these years—haven't you? I'm sure you're a big enough man to acknowledge *that*.

LYNN. I think Mr. Hollister's bored stiff with us, if you ask me.

HAL. I suppose he is. But you've said your say, I'll bet, and I want him to know—

FATHER. I don't want to know *anything*.

HAL. But it's only fair to let me say that I'll stand up for my convictions before the whole town, if necessary. I know that unless we change the entire attitude of men and women towards each other—there won't be any marriage in the future. Unless we open our eyes to what happiness and decency really are—unless we lift ourselves to another plane of thought entirely—

FATHER. Oh, shut up about your plane of thought! You don't know any more what you're talking about than an unborn baby. Until you've *lived*—until you've gone through the mill—you don't know *yourself*, let alone anybody else. You don't know what kind of a fool you may be, or how you may ball things up.

HAL. That's just why we ought not to marry till we know—

FATHER. It's not the damned ideas that will get

you anywhere—it's yourself. If you're ever lucky enough to have a woman love you, you take care of that *one love*—and don't be so cocksure of yourselves. If you— [*Mary comes in from the hall*] Now see here, Mary, which one of these boys do you intend to marry?

MARY. Neither.

FATHER. You didn't start off on that outlandish idea last night without intending to marry *one* of them?

MARY. I hoped it would be one of them, of course. That's what I was going to find out.

FATHER. You couldn't have found that out by staying at home, I suppose, in a normal natural way?

MARY. I admit I found out a great deal more about it after I got home than I could have any other way.

HAL. How, Mary?

FATHER. Never mind that. You can't go as far as this with the most important thing in your life and drop it as if it was nothing at all. You can't go as far as this without having some indication as to which one of these boys you *prefer*. Now which one *is* it? What are you hesitating about?

MARY. I'm not hesitating at all. I know now if I'd gone off with each one of you *alone* for a year—we wouldn't have *known* each other. Now I know it takes most of one's life to do that.

HAL. Then we were right. I can't talk to you here, Mary, before other people—but you know I'd rather lose you than have you make a mistake.

MARY. [*Taking his hand quickly in both of hers*] Thank you, Hal. [*He goes out*]

LYNN. Mary, what's changed you since last night? What are you going to do?

MARY. Father, listen! This is what I've just told Mother. When I got home I told Lynn I loved him—and I do. I love him so much I can't live without him. I was going to marry him—quick. But now I wouldn't marry him for anything on earth.

FATHER. Why not?

LYNN. What do you mean?

MARY. Marriage is a disgusting sordid business affair that I wouldn't go into for anything.

LYNN. Mary!

MARY. But if you want me to, Lynn, I'll live with you till we're *sure* what we really mean to each other, and when we *know* we'll either be married or quit.

LYNN. Good heavens, Mary! You don't know what you're talking about.

FATHER. Is this the kind of muck and filth you've been thinking about?

LYNN. Why you never even dreamed of such a thing.

MARY. I didn't think I'd actually do it, 'till I found out how horrible a perfectly good and respectable marriage can be.

FATHER. Haven't you any decency about anything?

MARY. I'm sorry, Dad, but Lynn's got to know. He's got to know why I won't marry him. It's because of Father and Mother, Lynn. I don't believe in marriage.

BOBBY. [*Coming in quickly*] I've got Mother to say she'll do it. [*He stops, seeing Lynn*]

FATHER. Do what?

LYNN. Do you want me to go?

MARY. Don't go 'way. Wait on the porch.

[*Lynn goes out onto the terrace*]

FATHER. [*To Bobby*] Do what?

BOBBY. Leave you.

FATHER. You—

[*He tries to speak but stops helplessly*]

BOBBY. I've bucked her up to that and I'm going with her and take care of her, Father. You needn't worry about that part of it. But don't spoil it now—will you? Don't say anything to make her lose her nerve.

MARY. You won't will you, Father? That's splendid, Bobby.

FATHER. [*Broken and unbelievingly*] Your mother didn't tell you—she'd leave me, did she?

BOBBY. Yes, she did.

[*Father goes slowly to the other end of the table and sits*]

MARY. You won't do anything to stop her—will you?

BOBBY. I'm thinking about you, Dad, just as much as I am about Mother. I know you want her to go. You just hate to come straight out and say so. Now's your chance—*do* it.

FATHER. Are you children blaming me for the whole thing?

BOBBY AND MARY. No!!!

MARY. Of course not, Father!

BOBBY. You bet we're not! I can see that it's hard livin' with a woman. Imagine one man living all his life with Gra'ma.

FATHER. [*Getting hold of himself again and rising*] You're acting like lunatics—both of you. If you've made your mother think I want her to leave me—

BOBBY. If *I* have? I like *that!* You mean if *you* have.

FATHER. You don't know *any*thing—you young whippersnapper. Your mother's the finest woman in the world. I'd lay down my life for her. Your poor dear mother!

[*Bobby and Mary look at each other—surprised and slightly disgusted at Father's sudden sentiment.*]

MARY. For goodness sake, don't get sentimental *now* Father—just as Mother's getting some spine.

BOBBY. I think as much. I worked like the devil to get her to come to the point.

FATHER. [*Quite himself again*] Now see here. If you think for one minute anything you say is going to— [*Mother opens the door and comes slowly into the room*] Mary—you haven't let anything these children have said influence you?

BOBBY. If you don't do what you said you were going to Mother—I'm going to clear out. I won't live here.

MARY. And you know what I'm going to do, Mother. I've told Father too.

FATHER. Be quiet—both of you. Now Mary dear —tell them there's nothing in this nonsense. Tell them

they've kicked up a fuss over nothing and we're going right on with our customary happy life. Assert yourself—and tell them they're entirely mistaken. [*A pause*] Come—come—go on—dearest.

[*Father tries to be sure of himself, and assumes a slightly affectionate gaiety. Mary and Bobby look at each other, half disgusted, half ready to laugh*]

MOTHER. I'm going away.

FATHER. You're not. I won't have it.

BOBBY. Go on, Mother.

FATHER. Be quiet, I say. What in the name of common sense do you think life is anyway? Your mother and I haven't done anything to get a divorce for.

BOBBY. Of course you haven't beaten her or broken the eighth commandment—or any—

MARY. The *seventh*, Bobby.

BOBBY. Un? Well—but what you have done is a thousand times rottener, and if you're going to keep right on I'm leavin'. How about it Mother?

MOTHER. They're rebelling against the ugliness—and meaness—the cruelty and pettiness. They think it doesn't have to be. They're saying very foolish things—but they're true—they're true. I'm going.

BOBBY. And I'm goin' with you.

MOTHER. No. I'm going alone. It's the only way we can find the truth about ourselves, Robert, or anything else. Where's Lynn?

MARY. Out there.

MOTHER. Call him in.

MARY. [*Going to the window*] Lynn!

[*Lynn comes in*]

MOTHER. Mary, I don't ask you *not* to do what you say you're going to—for I know I haven't given you anything better—but I ask you to wait. It isn't our marriage that was wrong—it's what we've done with it.

LYNN. I'm not afraid, Mary—I'll make you happy.

MARY. How do you know you will?

BOBBY. That's what. I thought the thing you were up to was all hot air and bunk—but I begin to believe there's a good deal in it. I know one thing, by golly—*I'll* never take a chance. I'll never take a chance of being where you and Father are. If you two couldn't make a go of it, I'd like to know who *can*. I don't see why men and women don't stop *tryin'* to live together—anyway.

[*He starts to go*]

MOTHER. [*Stopping Bobby with her hand and going to the door*] Oh no—that isn't it. It's we—ourselves and what *we've* done—that are wrong.

[*She goes out. Bobby follows. Father goes to the door*]

MARY. [*Putting her hand on Father's arm*] Let her go, Dad. Let her go.

FATHER. But I'll bring her back.

MARY. Do you mean you love her?

FATHER. You've got an awful lot to learn, little girl.

MARY. [*Suddenly throwing her arms about his neck*] Make her love you, Dad. Make it all over. If you could! If you could!

[*Father—too moved to speak holds her close for a moment and goes out—closing the door.*]

LYNN [*Going down to Mary—after a pause*]

Gosh, I'm sorry. It's the last thing in the world I would have expected to happen.

MARY. Why didn't they know in the first place? Can anybody ever know?

[*Sitting in her father's place at the table*]

LYNN. *We* know. [*Sitting in Mother's place at the table*] We were *meant* for each other. No man ever loved a girl the way I love you.

MARY. I bet that's what Father said to Mother. I bet that's what *everybody* says. It makes me sort of sick.

LYNN. But we're different. We *know* what we've got.

MARY. How do we know we do? What if *the* very things you like in me now—you'd hate sometime. What if the things I think are strong and stunning in you now I'd think were pig-headed and kickable after awhile?

LYNN. How could we? People couldn't be better suited to each other than we are.

MARY. I suppose they thought that too. Twenty-five years Mother and Father have been looking at each other across the table. And most of that time they've wished they were looking at somebody else.

LYNN. Oh Mary, you don't—

MARY. If they hadn't been married, if they hadn't been *tied* to each other, or if Mother could have walked out and taken care of herself at any minute, they would have had to *please* each other in order to *hold* each other.

LYNN. I know. You're dead right. But what if they hadn't been married? You and Bobby wouldn't

have thanked them much for bringing you into the world without any name or anything to put your feet on.

MARY. I don't see that they've given us so darned much to put our feet on now. They've smashed everything I ever believed about love and marriage.

LYNN. Oh—your mother said it—there's nothing the matter with marriage—it's what people do with it. What's the use trying to bust up the best thing we've got? Why don't we begin to make marriage better instead of chucking it? Why don't we make it honest and decent and fair—and if we have made a mistake we'll *quit*.

MARY. Lynn—you're *marvelous*!

LYNN. You angel!

MARY. Oh *don't!* I bet Grandfather called Granny an angel—and knelt at her feet while he was saying it.

LYNN. Well old pal—we're going to be side by side—both on the same level—both on the square.

MARY. And just as free as though we weren't married at all.

LYNN. Absolutely.

MARY. No hold on each other but love.

LYNN. None.

MARY. And the minute that's gone—we're through.

LYNN. That's the stuff.

MARY. Give me your hand on that old man. [*They clasp hands*] *But* Lynn, I wouldn't marry you if I didn't *know* that ours *is* the love that will last forever. There *can't* be any doubt about a love as great as ours, can there, dear?

LYNN. [*Drawing her onto his knees*] You *bet* there can't.

MARY. I *do* think we're safe, because we've been intelligent about it. I adore the way your hair grows at the side, dearest.

LYNN. Your eyes are the most beautiful things in the world. They have in them *everything* I want.

MARY. [*Putting her arms about his neck*] I love you.

LYNN. I love you.

MARY. And we must make it the most wonderful love that was ever in the world.

[*She kisses his lips*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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